# SWI swissinfo.ch

# SWI swissinfo.ch: how we work

## Our approach – our craft – our style

This manual describes editorial directives and principles which are binding for journalists of SWI swissinfo.ch. These are precepts for fair and credible journalism.

They demonstrate our approach and serve as a guide in matters of style and how we craft our content. They contribute to quality assurance for all of our multimedia output, in all languages, and for all social media activities.

Unless specified otherwise in this document, SWI swissinfo.ch is bound by the editorial guidelines of [Swiss public radio and television](#) (SRF).

# Contents

### *Version control*

# 1 OUR APPROACH

## 1.1 BASICS

SWI swissinfo.ch is the international, digital service in ten languages provided by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR. We publish stories that reflect current debates, as well as background articles, opinion pieces and expert analysis. Our content provides context from a Swiss perspective – editorially independent, nuanced and balanced.

We aim to provide balanced and in-depth reporting targeting our content at an international audience interested in Switzerland, and to shed light on Swiss affairs and society as well as offer Swiss analysis of major international news. Our vision is to help the public better understand Switzerland.

We also produce content specifically directed at Swiss nationals living abroad, so they can make free and informed choices with regard to exercising their political rights in Switzerland.

The news and information service we provide is regulated in a service agreement between the Swiss Confederation and SRG SSR. This agreement is renewed every four years; the current mandate runs until the end of 2020. Fifty per cent of SWI swissinfo.ch funding is assured through a federal grant, and the other 50 per cent from radio and television licence fees.

The Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) guarantees the independence of SWI swissinfo.ch. That means SWI swissinfo.ch is free and autonomous in its choice of topics, as well as in the way content is produced and presented.

The editorial guidelines of the Swiss public broadcaster SRF are binding unless otherwise stipulated in this document.

This document serves as an in-house manual but is also an instrument of public accountability and is therefore available to the public.

## 1.2 MISSION STATEMENTS

In 2019 SWI swissinfo.ch formulated the following mission statements:

- We are a window onto Switzerland and, as a multifaceted entity, stand for the values of freedom, democracy, equality, respect and justice.
- We contextualize developments and decisions in Switzerland with a clear focus, taking a critical, in-depth approach in our reporting.
- We uphold our independence in all of our reporting, and are transparent in everything we publish. We work together with our global communities to allow the public to form their own opinions.
- We strive to be relevant in parts of the world where local media are unable to provide independent reporting, and offer analysis from a Swiss perspective.
- We conduct a dialogue of equals with our users, listen to their concerns and give them a voice.
- We embrace experimentation. We make use of our digital and dynamic environment to develop further, systematically and data-driven, to meet the needs of the public.
- We create global understanding for diverse cultures, exercise tolerance and initiate global dialogue.

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## 1.3 CORE PRINCIPLES

### 1.3.1 BALANCE

In all its reporting, SWI swissinfo.ch is vigilant in ensuring balanced reporting. All relevant opinions are taken into account when selecting sources. The public must be able to forge an informed opinion based on the facts and arguments provided.

We are not a mouthpiece for the loudest voices in debates, or the majority. Our aim is to show the diversity of Switzerland and great variety of opinion in our reporting.

This balance must not be evident in every single article; rather, it must be provided within the overall reporting on a particular subject. Items which are thematically related to votes or elections are subject to increased due diligence requirements (see SRF Journalistic Guidelines, Section 7).

### 1.3.2 TRANSPARENCY

We disclose our sources. To ensure that our users can form their own opinions, we provide not only the first and last names of our contact persons, but also their roles and vested interests, if relevant.

We are very cautious about using statements given by persons who do not wish to be mentioned by name. Reasons for anonymity must be justified, explained and thus understandable; the statements must be important and credible, otherwise we will not use them. We consider granting anonymity to, for example, people who face real threats to their lives, or who could be subject to discrimination. In such cases, an editor or the Editorial Board must be informed. In all cases, it must be made transparent that the anonymous person's real name is known to the editorial staff.

Journalists may not directly use sources if the source's identity is unknown to them.

Any vested interests on the part of our journalists (cf 1.5 political mandates) will be disclosed within the article. In the event of conflicts of interest, they are expected to withdraw from the reporting in question.

As a rule, the publication of news requires two mutually independent sources saying the same thing, or the original source of the information is cited in the news story. An exception can be made in cases where the source is highly credible (e.g. Keystone-SDA agency feed, information from another unit within SRG SSR). Curation of content is also possible (see Section 3.5.4). The credibility of the sources and their information must be verifiable in all cases. Sources must be clearly indicated.

Caution should be exercised when dealing with material from the internet, to avoid content (both text and multimedia) that may have been altered, doctored or otherwise falsified.

Wikipedia is not sufficient as a source citation, for the same reason as above. Information being used from this source must be verified through other sources.

To ensure that positions or arguments provided by anyone quoted in a story is understood within the proper context, it is important not only to specify a person's official title, but also, if need be, any other vested interests the person may have.

This transparency requirement also applies to images and audio recordings. For video and audio material from the internet, a link to the source must be provided.

The journalist must identify themselves as such when communicating with potential sources. In line with data protection rules, a conversation may only be recorded if the other person gives prior consent.

### 1.3.3 APPROPRIATENESS

The journalistic work of SWI swissinfo.ch is based on the "Declarations and Directives on the Duties and Rights of the Journalist" published by the Swiss Press Council. This document is available in four languages:

Declarations: https://presserat.ch/en/journalistenkodex/erklaerungen/

Directives: https://presserat.ch/en/journalistenkodex/richtlinien/

Particularly important with regard to information is the objectivity principle: Editorial content must present facts and events appropriately to ensure that the public is able to form its own opinion. The SRG SSR in particular upholds the following journalistic due diligence requirements:

- **Truthfulness:** A journalist does not say or show anything that is not held to be true to the best of their knowledge and belief.
- **Transparency:** He or she presents facts which are essential for a comprehensive understanding of how the article was produced (uncertainties or difficulties during research, reliability of sources, clear disclosure to support assertions, clearly indicating what is opinion or comment).
- **Expertise:** The journalist has a certain expertise concerning the topic being addressed.
- **Verification of facts obtained from another source:** Information from other sources may be used provided there is a certain degree of assurance that it is correct and the source is indicated.
- **Appropriate means:** The means used may not in any way be manipulative.
- **Presenting other opinions fairly:** When allegations are made against third parties, the opinion or response of the criticized person must be presented.
- **Impartiality with respect to the outcome:** Being ready to accept the outcome of thorough research even if it runs counter to the journalist's own opinion. If there is a risk that vested interests will have an influence on their reporting, for example in the event of political conflicts of interest or kinship, they cease involvement. Employees disclose vested interests which could be relevant to their work to their editor.

These values also apply to our individual and official statements on social media.

### 1.3.4 GENDER EQUALITY

Whether in text, audio or visual, we pay particular attention to ensuring equal representation of women and men, in all areas of our reporting:

- By ensuring that everyone has the same length of time to speak and that there is a balanced representation of genders, for example in the case of experts quoted in an article;
- By addressing all people in the same way (every woman and every man has a first and last name), and not reserving formal forms of address for men only (even among colleagues);
- By refraining from any and all references to clothing and physical characteristics of persons, provided these are irrelevant to the topic being addressed;

- By making it clear that misogynist humour is not welcome and that sexist and belittling remarks will be strongly condemned;
- By avoiding propagation of stereotypes on the role and appearance of women and men; the language we use reflects the people we are actually talking about;
- By using gender-appropriate language and the correct gender designation for the roles of all participants;
- By ensuring that violence against women is never and under no circumstances downplayed.

If both genders are meant, both are named. For this purpose, journalists can use, for example, plural forms (e.g. "the employees"), male and female forms (e.g. "the actresses and actors") or comprehensive forms (e.g. "the young people"). This also applies in particular to teasers or announcements on social media.

We also take care to avoid gender stereotypes in our visual presentation – iconic images can show, for example, a female CEO or a male nursery school teacher.

## 1.4  CHECKING AND CORRECTIONS

### 1.4.1  QUALITY

The quality of the service provided is pivotal for a public service provider like SRG SSR. The licence granted to SRG SSR designates the following criteria for measuring the quality of its news and information service:

- Relevance
- Professionalism
- Independence
- Diversity
- Accessibility

As an author, every journalist is responsible for his or her output, in terms of both content and form (spelling, layout, etc.).

For quality assurance purposes, texts and multimedia elements must always be reviewed by an editor (four-eyes principle). Content adapted into ten languages will also be quality checked by a member of the editorial board or the producer (six-eyes principle) before publication.

Members of the editorial board as well as editors of the individual language services provide feedback on current output, either within the language/multimedia department or at the daily editorial meeting. At biweekly quality assurance meetings, the editorial board and editors review output with the aim to ensure and improve compliance with the journalistic directives and ethical and legal principles. Monthly editorial feedback sessions are held to involve and inform all journalists.

In addition to this, at the behest of the editorial board and at irregular intervals, selected auditors review output and respond to questions on quality. This is particularly important for content published in languages other than Switzerland's national languages.

The Public Council, a committee representing the public, provides regular, systematic assessment reports. It is a multilingual body in order to review multilingual content. Members of the council who represent different world regions are rotated regularly to ensure

monitoring across all languages. The feedback from the Public Council is relayed directly to the journalists by the editorial board. The representatives also have a "Q-Day", when they visit the language service for the linguistic region or regions they represent to gain insights into their work and to provide direct feedback for improvements.

The Ombudsperson monitors compliance. When complaints are received, the Ombudsperson's office liaises between the public and people and institutions affected by media reports, on the one hand, and the editorial teams at SWI swissinfo.ch, on the other. Since 2016, complaint cases can also be submitted to the Independent Complaints Authority (ICA). These cases cover not only editorial content produced by SWI swissinfo.ch, but also comments by users.

### 1.4.2  ERRORS

Everyone makes mistakes – and it is the duty of journalists to correct them as soon as possible.

Errors identified in published items, whether on SWI swissinfo.ch or its social media pages, must be corrected immediately. If these are reported by an external user, they need to be checked before any changes are made. A response regarding the corrections made based on the tip received is compulsory.

Incorrect spellings, typos etc. will be made directly within the item itself; a note highlighting the correction is not required.

Corrections to content (incorrect names, numbers, location information, circumstances) will be made and disclosed in a box within the article.

Gross errors will also be corrected directly within the item; in addition to this, the correction must be explained in a text appended to the item (What has been corrected? Date of correction, etc.). The publication date in the metadata will not be changed when the correction is made.

When complaints are received from external sources, requesting changes, the issue is brought to the editorial board. In cases where requests are made to have an item withdrawn or deleted, the SRG SSR legal service can be consulted.

When errors are found, they are communicated along with the correction to all language services publishing the same or adapted content.

When users bring errors on social media to our attention, we must react swiftly, transparently, and objectively.

## 1.5  POLITICAL MANDATES

Programme staff may belong to a political or trade organization (party, association, union, etc.) as an ordinary member. However, they refrain from accepting mandates (directorships, seats in parliament, retainers, consultancy work) and the like.

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# 2 OUR CRAFT

## 2.1 LANGUAGE

Not all users read our content in their first language. Consequently, we use clear, comprehensible and vivid language. Important:

- Short sentences, no convoluted sentences
- Active formulations using verbs instead of passives and nominalization
- Review abbreviations – if they are necessary, write them out in full and explain them on first mention
- Explain technical terms

Our tone is serious, fair, objective and appropriate to the topic at hand Only in exceptional cases do we choose the first-person perspective, e.g. in reportages designed to use this convention.

We refrain from using biased and populist language, with special care being taken in political reporting with regard to using other people's words. If these have an ideological slant, they must be clearly shown as being quoted, e.g. "foreign judges" or "popular initiative against mass immigration".

We only use our own opinions and subjective assessments in commentaries or other opinion pieces; they must be clearly identified and differentiated as such.

## 2.2 ARTICLE AND CONTEXT

Every article on SWI swissinfo.ch has a clear connection to Switzerland and/or conveys Swiss perspectives. SWI swissinfo.ch writes above all for users who are not necessarily experts on Switzerland, and who are therefore not fully familiar with the intricacies of its politics and institutions. This requires additional context. Embedding the report clearly into the relevant dossier or topic area (redirection with link visible within article) and into the flow of the current situation/debate is key here.

When producing news items and reports, we adhere to the ground rules of news journalism. Every item answers the journalistic questions (Who? What? How? When? Where?). To the extent that the scope of the piece and time allow, we are also interested in: Why? and What happens next?

Each item must speak for itself.

It will contain:

- A core message
- Why this core message is important or relevant at the time of publication
- Necessary but not excessive background information
- Quotes and source references

The item must not require the audience to already know a large amount. And it must not raise any questions it does not answer or make any promises it does not keep, especially not in the title. Consequently, titles – wherever possible – should stay true to the original when

being adapted. The facts required to understand the item must be mentioned and must be correct; claims must be substantiated.

Complex content should be visualized or presented and conveyed in a simplified way.

### 2.2.1 COMMUNITY FOCUS

Our market is highly diverse. As a result, we address ourselves to communities. We do this in a direct, comprehensible and relevant manner, for example by:

- Creating a **personal benefit** or connection for the user: we always ask ourselves how an article relates to the user, or what they will learn from it/how they will benefit from it.
- Creating a **connection to current events**: Topicality engenders relevance – ideally we provide in-depth reporting on current topics (for example the Swiss Weapons Act after a spree killing in the United States).
- Highlighting what users can **learn from Switzerland**: Cases and examples from Switzerland and/or users' own countries facilitate understanding.
- Drawing **comparisons** between countries: By comparing Switzerland to the user's own country, we can create connections.
- Where necessary, providing **background information**: Conspicuous links to existing SWI swissinfo.ch content and explanatory boxes make complex content easier to understand.

### 2.2.2 QUOTES

Only the best, most incisive statements are made into quotes. Quotes enhance an item because they give an affected individual the opportunity to express themselves or convey local colour to users. They give us credibility, and users verifiability. Reformulations are only permitted in indirect speech, when this will make the statement easier to understand.

For translations, wherever possible quotes should be inserted/appended in direct speech, as this is the usage in many foreign languages. However, each desk is free to convert these quotes into indirect speech in their own offering.

For quotes, we stick to the exact wording (leaving out banalities). Quotes are denoted using inverted commas. Only in exceptional cases will they be suitable for use as titles.

Caution is advised when using quotes from other media. The source should always be given, as should a link to the original text. Use of quotes from interviews (Q&A) and from radio and TV broadcasts is usually not a problem; however, the source must always be given and, where possible, a link as well.

### 2.2.3 TRANSLATIONS/ADAPTATIONS

At SWI swissinfo.ch, a large proportion of our output is published in several languages, or even all ten. Linguistic adaptation is thus part of our core business. The challenge lies in making the text understandable and attractive to users and remaining true to the original content.

If a piece is being rendered into another language, the target language version should be produced in such a way that it reads like an original text. The source language should not be reflected in the translated target version in terms of its style or structure.

To make the translation more easily comprehensible, sometimes additional explanations or clarifications are required. When adapting titles, the core message should be retained, mirroring the content of the original. The writer can suggest options for abridging his or her content. Journalists wishing to also make cuts or changes to the storytelling in their adaptation may do so in consultation with and with the consent of the original author.

Translated texts must remain true to the original and to the essence of the item. Significant changes – such as changes to the structure, leaving out certain sources, leaving out multimedia elements – must be discussed with the author/their line manager.

### 2.2.4 CONTEXT

Every item must provide context to allow it to be understood by someone with no prior knowledge of the topic and to anchor the story within its topic area. The following ten questions should be considered when producing and revising items for SWI swissinfo.ch. It is vital that acceptance/review of items be carried out using the tooled version.

**Internal links**

- Have we included links to our relevant stories on the same topic?
- Is the dossier prominently displayed (ideally just below the lead)?
- Are there links to the key explainers we have on the topic?

**External links**

- Are there links to the key stakeholders (people and organizations)?
- Do the links meet exclusively journalistic criteria?
- Do they offer added value and additional context?

**Context**

- Is there an info box?
- Does it contain important, complementary information?
- Is the info box in the right place?

**Final question**

- Can I understand all parts of the article if I have no prior knowledge of the topic?

### 2.2.5 TAGGING

Journalists are responsible for ensuring that their items have the correct tags for the metadata.

The beat tag must be included. Anyone revising or inspecting/approving a text must also check the tags.

Tags are important because they help us to structure our content and to collect data on it in line with our strategy. This can help pave the way for packaging and automation options in future.

### 2.2.6 SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

To give our items the best possible distribution and visibility, it is important for them to be displayed prominently on search engines. The following points should be borne in mind with regard to search engine optimization (SEO):

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**Before publication:**

- The key search-relevant terms relating to the topic, such as names of people or businesses and thematic keywords (e.g. Switzerland, elections, climate change...) belong in the title and thus in the internet address (URL) or, at a push, the lead. But in general, and in particular for "social", the following applies: the title also has to be engaging (if the article is found but not clicked on it doesn't help anyone). A balance must be struck here between information content and attractiveness.
- The URL can be adjusted manually: it makes sense to place important keywords as close to the beginning of the URL as possible (especially if a title contains no keywords; see above). Filler words can go. (e.g. swissinfo.ch/eng/why-do-we-lose-an-hour-in-summertime —> swissinfo.ch/eng/why-clocks-change-summer-winter).
- Sub-titles in text are almost as relevant as titles for both search engines and readers. They are especially important for visually impaired people, to help them orient themselves within the article.
- Surtitles (main heading/meta title), on the other hand, are not recognized as such by Googlebot. Neither do they appear in the app. They should be used only to make it easier for readers to gain an overview on the front page, but the title always needs to make sense even without the meta title.
- Every caption must specify who or what is to be seen in the image. Apart from anything else, we owe this to our visually impaired users, who are not able to understand an image without this text. But search indexing also benefits from good captions.
- Images can be linked to internal articles too, if it makes sense to do so.
- If a video or tweet or graphic can also be integrated, even better: rich articles, i.e. content with multiple elements, are preferred by Google.
- Within the text, related terms (in case of doubt these can be found via Google) or synonyms should be used. Relevant search combinations can be searched for via Google (look at suggestions or scroll right to the bottom of the page after running a search).
- Meaningful internal linking is important, in text as well as teasers. Writers should also refer to any older report or background article they have published previously.
- Thematic tags should always be set as accurately as possible. Google News uses these to some extent to select reports relating to current events.

**After publication**

After publication is before publication. Wherever possible, a story, a theme will be further developed on the basis of social media discussions. Discussions on social media open up opportunities for new investigations.

- Select hashtags depending on platform – none for Facebook, a few for Twitter (especially in the case of events), as many as possible, appropriate and relevant on Instagram.
- Without fail: post/time articles on Facebook and Twitter and open up a discussion room.
- Story elements should be posted on social media platforms separately (e.g. screenshots of graphics, images, videos). This is less about increasing traffic and more about boosting engagement.
- People or institutions who link to us are one of our most important sources of traffic: Key persons, associations, businesses, clubs, fan clubs and all other interested parties can be personally addressed and made aware of the content.

- A list of thematic "hubs", which can be tweeted to again and again, helps in day-to-day work.
- Dossiers: Check whether the article fits into a beat or an existing dossier (also, don't forget "how-to" content). Everywhere the article is posted it can find new users/Google links.

## 2.3 RESEARCH AND REPORTING

### 2.3.1 EMBARGOES

Objectively justified embargoes must be adhered to, in particular periods which give the media time to prepare their reporting. In our opinion, embargoes which only serve to give certain media an advantage over others are not justified. If we find an embargo unwarranted, we will inform the information provider in a timely manner so as to allow them to notify the other media also. Before breaching an embargo, journalists must consult their line manager. We will not accept news embargoes which make it difficult or impossible for us to select topics freely.

### 2.3.2 NO PAYMENT FOR INFORMATION

SWI swissinfo.ch does not pay money for information to anyone. In exceptional cases, it is permissible to provide compensation for expenses incurred by sources in order to brief or support employees. If the total sum exceeds CHF300, approval must be obtained from the editorial board.

### 2.3.3 RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

At the beginning of a research interview, journalists must introduce themselves unequivocally as SWI swissinfo.ch employees to the persons being interviewed and broadly outline their intentions. If telephone conversations are being recorded, journalists must always declare this to the other participant. Making covert recordings of telephone conversations is a criminal offence.

Journalists have the freedom to establish all facts of public interest without being obstructed. Non-disclosure of public or private matters vis-a-vis journalists can only be enforced in exceptional cases and only if the reasons for this are clearly stated (source: Swiss Press Council).

The person being interviewed has the right, upon request, to read their own quotes before publication and to learn in what context these are being published. Interviews in Q&A form will be sent to the interviewee for authorization. Other than that, in principle complete articles are never released before publication. Exceptions must be justified and discussed with the journalist's line manager. The interviewee must be able to recognize their own statements, even in a highly condensed text.

When statements have been approved by interviewees, they can no longer be retracted, however the situation develops. We take a stand on this even in the face of major opposition.

All persons mentioned in articles have the right to comment on facts mentioned in our content which relate to them.

A source may not make access to information conditional upon positive coverage. Journalists defend the freedom of information and the freedom to comment and criticize.

### 2.3.4   RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN

We respect the right to be forgotten. Whenever we receive corresponding claims and requests to delete an item, the editorial board must always be called in.

Even though "being forgotten" cannot be demanded as a right, this is a matter of not taking a past legal or administrative penalty and rehashing it in the media a long time after the fact. Let bygones be bygones: this facilitates social reintegration. Expunging a previous conviction from a person's criminal record also serves this purpose. Convicted persons have a "right to be forgotten". This applies particularly after proceedings are terminated and after acquittals. (Source: Swiss Press Council)

When a previous conviction is relevant to a current report, there is no right to be forgotten (question of proportionality).

### 2.3.5   ELECTIONS AND VOTING

SWI swissinfo.ch plays a key role in opinion making for Swiss expatriates in the run-up to elections and votes. Consequently, the requirements in terms of appropriateness, diversity of opinion and fairness are particularly high. The editorial teams ensure that, in aggregate, both pro and contra sides get a fair say and that reporting contains an appropriate measure of relevant, factual background information to aid voting decisions.

Reports on elections and votes which are dictated by current events and editorially justified can be submitted at any time. However, the following applies: the closer the election or voting day, the more important it is to ensure appropriateness and pluralism in our offering. The following cut-off dates apply for reporting:

- Opinion polls cannot be published any later than ten days before the vote.
- In the week preceding a vote, even individual news items must without fail provide a balanced view.
- After the Thursday preceding a vote, in principle no new content on the subject may be published.
- In the case of Federal parliamentary elections, we interpret the rules on due diligence and balance more strictly, following the SRG's standards (e.g. SRF Journalistic Guidelines 7.2 and 7.3)

### 2.3.6   RELIGIOUS TOPICS

Special attention must be paid to religious topics as there is a tendency to exploit these in socio-political debate. We do not provide opportunities for stirring up hatred. We make a point of respecting the religious feelings of our users.

Post-publication debates surrounding articles with religious themes on social media must be monitored and particularly carefully moderated.

### 2.3.7   NAMES OF OFFENDERS/VICTIMS

In general, names of offenders or victims of offences are not used. The same applies to victims of disasters or accidents. We respect the presumption of innocence in the case of

suspected offenders and the right to privacy of victims. We pay particular respect to the privacy of under-age offenders/victims.

Exceptions to this rule – which require approval from the editorial board – can be made, for example, when the names of these persons are already generally known by the public, such that not mentioning them would be jarring.

For public figures, this threshold is set lower. People living in the public eye or occupying an important position in public life enjoy a lesser level of data protection, in particular in cases where their offences are associated with their position.

## 2.4 DIALOGUE WITH THE USER COMMUNITY

### 2.4.1 DIRECT DIALOGUE

E-mails, comments and dialogues on social media should receive a response from us as promptly as possible and using the correct form and style. In general, journalists respond to complaints directed at them personally. Errors are corrected immediately and made transparent, with thanks for the information. In the case of complaints involving a claim, the complainer must be made aware of the option to access the ombudsperson.

We must be aware that we represent not just ourselves but also SWI swissinfo.ch as a collective in these dialogues. If our journalists are perceived as biased or pursue activist agendas on social media, this can compromise the credibility of the entire organization.

If employees are subjected to threats during dialogue they should contact their line manager. In cases of doubt, the legal service should be brought in.

### 2.4.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are distribution channels for our content and platforms, allowing us to get directly in contact with our users. We also use them to conduct research on our topic areas, obtain feedback and inputs for our reporting, enrich our journalistic content and introduce potential users to the work of SWI swissinfo.ch. Every journalist is responsible for ensuring that his or her content is appropriately represented on social media and is being discussed. He or she takes part in the debate where appropriate.

**Official SWI profiles**

We adapt our language to fit the platform in question; this can be, for example, informal, humorous, charming, youthful, creative, accessible or personal. We are always professional in our demeanour and adhere to the journalistic standards and editorial guidelines of SWI swissinfo.ch. We actively seek to engage with users on an equal footing and make direct personal contact with them. If it makes sense journalistically and in terms of content, we can refer to content from other providers.

Once something is online it cannot be deleted; consequently, we attach particular importance to respect, quality, justice and neutrality. We do not publish anything that could not be put out on the front page of SWI swissinfo.ch.

Other people's personal opinions are to be respected and always taken seriously. Offensive or unethical/unlawful content will be suppressed and users warned. COMMENTS IN CAPITALS LIKEWISE. Repeat offenders may be blocked from using the site without any

reason being given. Before they are locked out, a screen shot of the comment must be saved.

In the case of comments or discussions on sensitive subjects, we obtain a second opinion from within the organization. If the discussion is directed against individuals, the organization or its employees, the editorial board will be informed.

**Private profiles used for professional purposes**

Use of social media for professional purposes is desirable and encouraged by the company. This could for example take the form of maintaining contacts with journalists from other media, obtaining or exchanging information, or maintaining a dialogue between equals with users. These profiles are regarded as a natural extension to the work of a journalist. Because of this, the same principles apply in terms of professional ethics. As representatives of a media company committed to maintaining balance, journalists have a responsibility for the credibility, balance and quality of all SWI swissinfo.ch products.

**Private profiles**

Personal remarks made on private profiles may be associated with the company or directed against it. That means that in principle, the same rules apply to these profiles as to the other profiles. We respectfully and objectively inform colleagues from other media if there are gaps or errors in their research. It is advisable to only make remarks that you can stand by if they are, for example, published in a newspaper. Journalists must therefore also refrain from taking sides in their personal profiles, as this could reflect on SWI swissinfo.ch publications.

Employees must refrain from propaganda or promotional activities, for example for political parties or interest groups, as this could compromise their credibility and thus that of SWI swissinfo.ch publications.

Whenever possible, Twitter profiles should be verified (blue tick).

### 2.4.3  PUBLIC DIALOGUE/COMMENTS ON THE WEBSITE

All user comments posted on SWI swissinfo.ch and the associated platforms are reviewed by the editorial staff – comments on the website before publication, comments on social media shortly after posting.

Excluded from discussion are texts with indecent and illegal content, in particular content which is offensive, slanderous, damaging to a person or company's reputation or business, pornographic, or racist, but also radical remarks and incitements to violence or other offences. Such content will be deleted immediately, with a reference to Netiquette.

We also do not publish texts with commercial or promotionally effective content or content written exclusively in capitals and having a dominant effect on the internet.

Links attached to comments by users will not be published. User comments are not edited by staff. The length of a text is not a reason for not allowing a comment. However, users are not automatically entitled to have a comment published.

In case of doubt, employees should seek the opinion of their line manager.

### 2.4.4  USER-GENERATED CONTENT / CONTRIBUTIONS FROM USERS

An invitation to users to contribute (user-generated content) can provide a valuable enhancement to our reporting.

User contributions must be processed with due diligence and critical distance, as spoofing cannot be ruled out. If there is any doubt about something being claimed as fact by a user, always ask for the source. In the case of user-generated image or text content, employees must make sure that rights of use have been clarified and documented.

# 3 OUR STYLE

## 3.1 BASIC PRINCIPLE

Our content is written for users, and not for ourselves. Their interests take absolute priority over our customs and personal requirements.

Consequently, we try to reach our users in the best way for them. This is increasingly on smart phones, instead of desktop computers. This is increasingly on social media and other platforms, instead of our website.

We do not work in isolation. Good content is a product of cooperation between various language desks, in the beats, and specialists in different formats and/or marketing and IT.

## 3.2 TEXTS AND THEIR ELEMENTS

### 3.2.1 LENGTH

The following standard values are mandatory, characters including spaces:

| | |
|---|---|
| TPT ("thème pour tous") | 6000 - 8000 |
| Standard pieces (multi and bilateral) | 4000 - 8000 |
| Quick Win | 1000 - 4000 |
| News in Depth | 1000 - 4000 |
| News in Brief | 1000 - 2000 |
| Lead | 250 |
| Teaser text | 145 |
| Title | 50 - 60 |
| Meta title | 30 |

In exceptional cases, longer or shorter texts may be approved for certain topics (especially for reportages and/or TPTs). Approval should be based on a discussion of the content. These cases require consent from the editorial board.

In principle: Articles must have a minimum character count of 1000 (cf. also Section 2.6.6 on search engine optimization SEO).

### 3.2.2 STRUCTURE

A compelling article has a logical structure (golden thread), confines itself to relevant information which has an immediate connection to the topic at hand and is essential for explaining that topic. We also need to consider that the users do not have the same level of knowledge as users in Switzerland.

Every item, time after time, should provide further incentives to users to engage as well as affording them points of entry to the topic: sub-titles and images structure the text and provide anchor points for users. Rule of thumb: for each mobile screen there must be a visual interruption within the text. This could be an image, sub-title, highlighted quote, graphic, etc.

At the same time, writers should take care to provide appropriate transitions between text and multimedia passages such that media discontinuities are as minimal as possible. It is not necessary to give a say to all the information sources in the piece: as brief as possible – as long as necessary.

Our output is based on the "mobile first" principle. All our content is optimized for viewing on smart phones. In particular, this means clear paragraphs. The mobile display should be checked before publishing.

### 3.2.3 LINKS

Every SWI swissinfo.ch item contains all relevant and appropriate links needed to complement, enlarge upon and explain the topic. It is the duty of every journalist to ensure that these links are incorporated. Links can be to both internal and external sources; the latter will always open in a new window. The linked sites provide added value. When choosing linked sites, preference should be given to those which provide specific information. We also provide links to offerings from other media providers.

Links are set exclusively in accordance with journalistic criteria and may not be commercialized (cf. Art. 18 para. 2f SRG licence). In addition, external links must be clearly identified as such. The terms of use state that SWI swissinfo.ch assumes no responsibility for third-party content. We do not link to any sites which conflict with our journalistic or ethical standards (for example offerings which glorify violence or which could be harmful to minors).

It is possible to link to content in a different language if there is no better alternative available and an important reason for doing so.

Checklist:

- Is the link still valid?
- What and who is behind the page?
- What added value is the user getting from it?

We are responsible for the links we provide.

### 3.2.4 INFO BOX

Info boxes are neither a summary of the article nor copied from the internet; rather, they contain important, complementary information based on journalistic investigation. As with other texts, they require clear source references. Info boxes have a maximum length of 1500 characters. Ideally, they should be positioned high up and to one side in the article and have the purpose of placing the article within a context or current debate. Another possibility is to

place info boxes in positions where they provide a logical, meaningful complement to the text.

## 3.3 ELEMENTS OF TEXT PRODUCTION

### 3.3.1 TITLE

The title is the article's calling card. Everything comes down to the first few seconds.

Rule 1: Concrete, not abstract

Rule 2: Explicit, not ambiguous

Rule 3: Emotional, but not biased

Rule 4: Gripping, not one-dimensional

Rule 5: Creative, not predictable

If a story (check Parse.ly) is not read, the author should modify the title.

Ideally, a good title will perform three functions:

- Give users a brief and concise idea of the content.
- Be understandable and relevant to the target group.
- Appeal to readers and thus make them curious about the item.

The title must reflect the essence (key message) of the item and should take the form of a full sentence, with subject and predicate. The title should be concrete and precise; it should contain all the essential information to allow it to be understood on its own, without a meta title. It should include the most important keyword or keywords in the article (an article on Guantanamo must contain the word "Guantanamo"). Exactness and completeness come before aesthetics here.

Colons in titles should be used in moderation. The promise given by the title must be kept by the item's content. The title must not mislead the reader and should not oversell the story. Puns should be used with restraint; most of the time, they do not work in translation.

A title should be no more than 50-60 characters long. Titles should be checked in mobile and desktop view.

The ability of the title to stand alone is important in terms of recognition on the internet and social networks. Meta titles are not displayed on Google or Facebook.

Criteria for good titles are:

- Informative and interesting at the same time
- No foreign words, metaphors or PR speak
- No irony, but short words are welcome

- No brackets, commas or colons
- No names of unknown persons
- Correct spelling, grammar, wording and message
- Present tense and active form (verb)

Questions are only possible in exceptional cases, and should then be answered in the article. With subjective text forms, a slightly freer style can be adopted. Repetitions, in either content or form, should be avoided in titles, meta titles, teasers and leads.

### 3.3.2 SURTITLE (MAIN HEADING/META TITLE)

Main headings complement titles and may not contain any repetitions, but not with absolutely essential information; the keywords are in the title. The main heading serves to categorize the item within its overarching context and to provide reading guidance. At the same time, the meta headline should be chosen to be as specific as possible (e.g. "Buddhism" instead of "Religion").

A main heading should be no more than 30 keystrokes long.

### 3.3.3 SUB-TITLE

Sub-titles are placed in such a way that there is never only text on a mobile screen display. They should intrigue the reader and make them want to read on. A section should take up a maximum of half a mobile screen.

### 3.3.4 LEAD

We often prefer a so-called "impulse lead", which fulfils two functions:

- It captures what is being discussed in the article (core idea, essence, but not a summary of the article)
- It creates suspense and an inducement to read the whole article.

The sentences used are concise, memorable and unembellished. They must not mislead users.

For "news" items, where the information aspect predominates, "impulse leads" are less appropriate.

A lead should not exceed 250 characters or so.

### 3.3.5 INTRODUCTION

The introduction to an article also deserves particular care. It has a different tone to the lead. The item should begin with information that makes users sit up and pay attention: an interesting case, a specific example, a provocative statement. Explanations and background will follow later on in the text.

### 3.3.6 TEASER (SHORT LEAD)

The teaser/short lead is of similar importance to the title. A teaser should be less informative/objective than a title – its purpose is rather to act as a kind of "lasso" which reels the user in and wakes their curiosity. The teaser whets the reader's appetite.

Teasers are not introductions or leads. They are a perspective on the topic. A good teaser engages the reader and sets an initial, rough direction in terms of content. Teasers do not contain brackets, unnecessary explanations or interpolations. They should be no longer than 145 characters.

## 3.4 NAMES AND SIGNATURES

### 3.4.1 NAMES OF PERSONS AND BUSINESSES

Professional titles such as Colonel, Doctor, Professor, etc. are provided if they are important in relation to the topic in order to demonstrate the credibility of the statements being made.

To avoid promotional effects or giving an advantage to a particular market player, we refrain from using company or product names.

If mentioning names is unavoidable, or not doing so would be jarring, we use these names as little as possible. Companies or products which are criticized in our reports must be named so as to avoid bringing competitors into disrepute. Criticized companies must be given the opportunity to respond.

### 3.4.2 SIGNATURES (BYLINES)

With the signature we make it clear that an item has been created by an SWI swissinfo.ch journalist and declare who is responsible for the content and its form. In cases where several journalists have made a significant contribution to the item, their names will also be listed.

All direct contributors will be named equally and uniformly with signatures: First name last name (text), first name last name (image editing), first name last name (photography), first name last name (data). If one person has delivered more than one element: First name last name (text & images or text & multimedia).

Individuals who have proofread, edited or adapted the text are not listed. However, they can be mentioned at the end of the text in a footnote.

For reportages or reports by correspondents or special correspondents, we give the location in the signature.

Texts or passages within texts taken from agencies must be identified accordingly (i.e. "Keystone-SDA"). If the text has been edited even slightly, it must be signed with "agency and initials of journalist".

For pure editorial preparation of existing news items, no author name is necessary, only initials.

All multimedia elements are also signed and source references given. In the case of videos, we declare if they have been fully or partly made by other SRG business units. This usually happens within the video itself.

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## 3.5 SPECIFIC JOURNALISTIC FORMS

### 3.5.1 INTERVIEW / Q&A

An interview allows us to provide a personal approach to a topic.

This journalistic form also allows an individual to present their point of view on a particular topic.

Interviewees must be informed that the conversation is being recorded.

The journalist questions the statements made by the interviewee and structures the discussion. In the case of controversial topics, the journalist must put the opposing position up for discussion. Questions must be formulated in a direct and straightforward way, and be as brief as possible. An interview must be well prepared for and conducted in a professionally competent manner. The journalist is in a critical and distanced role here.

Research questions (questions on facts) generally do not belong in a Q&A. One exception here is questions on completely new developments. The journalist's opinion has no place in an interview.

Interviews conducted in writing should be avoided. If such an interview is published, this must be declared by including a sentence in italics at the bottom of the article: "This interview was conducted in writing by e-mail on xxx (date)."

Cuts to interviews are subject to the customary journalistic rules on fairness.

The interviewee has the right to see the transcribed interview before it is published. Factual errors or incorrect wording may be amended; however, journalists must never leave out entire questions or make changes that distort the meaning of the content at the interviewee's request.

If no agreement can be reached on the use of an interview, the interviewee may retract the interview. They may not retract the informational content of the interview. If necessary, the statement can be quoted in indirect speech.

Media-savvy interviewees (politicians, press officers) know that their statements can be published. All other respondents must be made aware of this fact.

If an interviewee has a business or special relationship with SRG, this must be made transparent. The interviewee should be described with a brief résumé stating their job and particular achievements or similar. If an interviewer has a special or close relationship with an interviewee this must be made transparent.

Special conditions agreed upon before the recording of the interview (e.g. abstaining from asking certain questions) must be made transparent when the interview is published. Journalists are not allowed to publish interviews conducted on the basis of an informal conversation without the explicit consent of the other person.

Once the interviewer and interviewee have come to terms, previous versions of the interview may no longer be used.

In terms of form, the following rules apply:

- Questions should be in bold.
- The first name and last name of the interviewee should be placed before the first answer.

- Before all other answers the journalist should put the interviewee's initials.
- After the lead comes a brief introduction to the topic with information to assist with understanding and provide an enticement to read the interview. The introduction will also briefly introduce the interviewee.
- Noteworthy citations will be highlighted as quotes.

When adapting interviews into other languages, writers are allowed to reproduce the content in a different journalistic form. When doing so they must not make any changes that will distort the meaning of the text, and a clear distinction must be made between a statement by the interviewee and how the content is otherwise presented editorially.

### 3.5.2 COMMENTARIES / OPINIONS / ANALYSES

Analyses of world events from a Swiss perspective are part of the core offering of SWI swissinfo.ch. In the case of external authors of such analyses, attention should be paid to whether the argument is balanced. All points of view on the topic must be represented, to allow readers to form their own opinion. If an external author takes sides, SWI swissinfo.ch must also present the opposite position.

Journalists with more in-depth knowledge of dossiers may write analyses which go beyond neutral, absolutely unbiased reporting. What is important here is not the writer's opinion, but rather the focus and argumentation, the exposure of interrelationships and consequences. Analyses help with understanding of complex issues. They are fact-based, free from prejudice and balanced. The argumentation is comprehensible and plausible. This content should be clearly identifiable as analysis. Texts from a personal perspective are possible. Although subjective, they are based on facts and not on personal opinions. Otherwise, the same journalistic principles apply as for all other articles.

Op-eds, as prevalent in the print media, are not often used at SWI swissinfo.ch. They can be deployed in the case of important elections or votes, or in exceptional cases for other key events, in consultation with the editorial board.

Op-eds must likewise be based on comprehensible, factual arguments but may also include trenchant and sometimes even provocative thoughts on a topic. Op-eds must without fail be revised or reviewed by a member of the editorial board.

Good commentaries have a spoken quality. They live by the vividness of the language and lose cogency when presented like dictionary entries.

### 3.5.3 PROFILES

A profile is a vibrantly described story which is factually oriented but with a subjective tinge. A reportage on a person which constitutes more than just a description of their biography.

A profile includes not just facts, but also observations by the journalist regarding character traits, activities, ways of thinking, feelings. But we do not put on paper our opinion of a person. We refrain from making value judgements or comments.

A profile is one of the most challenging stylistic forms in journalism. Nowhere else do you get so close to another person.

The profiled person, who may also reveal some very personal things about themselves, must be able to rely on the integrity and conscientiousness of the journalist. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, we maintain a critical distance (no "people pleaser" reports).

We do not need to question everything; however, neither should we take things the profiled person says at face value (verify wherever possible). The profile will seem more authentic and the profiled person more human if both strengths and weaknesses are discussed. Statements from third parties about the person being profiled are important.

Because it would be presumptuous to claim, after a 2-3 hour meeting, to know who and how a person is, we chiefly describe our encounter with the person (a brief excerpt from the life of). This is more authentic.

We do not profile anyone we are close to. Exceptions must be agreed with the editorial board and made transparent.

Based on current events it may be necessary to create a profile without being able to meet the person or speak to them beforehand (mostly public figures). For these profiles, journalists may use information from other media, for example published interviews, or from sources who know the profilee well, or used to.

The text will not be sent to the person concerned before publication; at most they will receive a few excerpts to allow them to review the facts and quotes, as the interests of the profiled person and those of the journalist may not align in certain areas.

People who may not have the capacity to make sound judgements are to be protected from themselves. Even if they themselves seek publicity, we refrain from publishing reports relating to them.

### 3.5.4 CURATIONS AND PRESS REVIEWS

The principles of balanced reporting also apply to curations (acquisition of content from other media). If an acquired item shows only one perspective on a topic, supplementary content must be provided to ensure that the users can form their own opinion on the topic. These thematically linked items must contain actual links to each other.

The press review is a key tool used by SWI swissinfo.ch to convey an idea of the public state of mind with regard to an event or a decision taking place in another country. It allows us to cover an international topic from a Swiss perspective.

The press reviews published by SWI swissinfo.ch provide an overview of the media commentaries from the French-, Italian- and German-speaking regions of Switzerland.

When a current event in Switzerland also sparks discussion in other countries, SWI swissinfo.ch can produce an international press review. All language desks are involved with this work in that they supply quotes from media in the regions of their language area. These quotes must be translated into a language that can be translated by the other desks (as a rule German, French or English).

### 3.5.5 REPORTAGE

A reportage is an account of an event, an issue or a situation based on facts, observations and witness statements which the journalist has compiled in situ.

When reading a reportage, users feel they have been transported into the reality described by the journalist.

The journalist describes their own observations and experiences from their own perspective in an accurate and unbiased way. Personal opinions, however, have no place in reportage.

### 3.5.6 FACT CHECKING

As part of fact checking, a statement from a public figure (e.g. a politician) will be selected and checked for its truthfulness based on reliable evidence. This can result in any of four possible verdicts: true, false, misleading or unproven (cf. here).

Within the context of his or her beat, any journalist can propose and implement a fact check. Suitable statements for fact checking are not obvious at first glance; however, they must be provable (no opinions or forecasts) and pertain to a topic of public interest within Switzerland.

Accuracy and transparency are key elements of a good fact check. Consequently, the specific internal guidelines ("Fact Checking Manual" and "How to write a fact checking article") must be consulted and the "Fact Check Core Group" should be called in.

## 3.6 MULTIMEDIA FORMATS

### 3.6.1 PHOTOS

In order to guarantee visual quality at SWI swissinfo.ch, in case of doubt the photo editors will have the last word on all images published on all our platforms. Of course, journalists may and should make suggestions at any time.

Criteria for selecting photos:

- Concrete is better than abstract.
- No divergence should arise between image and text.
- The image must fit into the context of the item; if there is a possibility of misunderstandings arising, these must be addressed through the caption.
- Wherever possible, we avoid using trite stock photography and staged photos.
- We depict the world in a factual and impartial way, and in particular refrain from ethnic, sexist or gender-specific stereotyping.

We refrain from inappropriately sensational depictions of violence and brutality. In general, we do not show pictures of abductees or suspects. Neither do we show pictures of executions or suicides. We are aware that there are images which could cause offence in certain target regions. In general, we adhere to the Directives of the Swiss Press Council. Scenes with sexual content should be assessed in line with the same standards. Audio and image recordings made at private memorial services or during religious services, images of dead people which are recognizable will not be published. In cases of doubt the editorial board will have the final say.

In cases of doubt over copyrights on images, the picture editors should be consulted before publishing.

### 3.6.2 SYMBOLIC IMAGES/COMPOSITE IMAGES

Journalists should declare edited images as "composite images" if the edited image represents a material change to or distortion of the information content of the original and the picture's message in the overall context of a media report. If an image used to illustrate an

article has no direct connection with the caption and text (symbolic image), this should be explicitly indicated if it will not be immediately obvious to the observer.

Rules: Code of Conduct Duty no 3 – suppression of information. Journalists do not suppress or misrepresent any important information. Directive 3.3 – Archive documents. Archive documents must be explicitly presented as such, if need be with a mention of the date of original publication or release. Directive 3.4 – Illustrations. Symbolic images (photographs or filmed sequences designed to illustrate a subject but not directly related to the text content) must be clearly distinguished from images of an informative or documentary character. Directive 3.5 – Reconstructions. Reconstructions and staged photos must be clearly signalled as such. Directive 3.6 – Composites. Composite photos and videos must be clearly signalled as such so that readers and viewers are protected from any risk of confusion (source: Swiss Press Council)

### 3.6.3 CAPTIONS

Every image used by SWI swissinfo.ch has a caption – exceptions may be made in justified cases. Captions provide explanations to help users understand the image and establish how it relates to the article. Captions should have different content to titles and teasers. They should be brief and can read like headlines.

Facilitates accessibility: Images are described for people with disabilities.

### 3.6.4 GRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

A graphic is the product of a collaboration between journalists, data journalists and/or designers. Research on statistical data requires particular care in order to be certain that the data used are correct and up to date and will not mislead users.

Graphical elements allow for a visual representation of the broader context. Their strengths lie in their clarity, accuracy and vividness. They must be able to be understood as a standalone element. Every graphic has a title and subtitle. The units used must be indicated as precisely as possible (e.g. Prices in 2018 in Swiss francs), so that users can understand exactly what we are showing them.

As with other content, clear source references are essential (source or provenance of the data, whenever possible a link to the data source, name of the journalist, data journalist and/or designer, plus the SWI swissinfo.ch logo). Where necessary, the methodology used to arrive at the figure/calculation will be explained.

Before graphical elements are used on our platforms they need to be given editorial approval.

### 3.6.5 PHOTO GALLERY

Photo galleries can complement articles, but can also be published as standalone elements. They are put together by the picture editors, who are responsible for all published images on all platforms. The same validation procedure applies here as for all other elements.

The accompanying text should be at least 1000 characters long. It must include a clear list of sources: Specify whether the text is a product of own research (SWI swissinfo.ch) or is information taken from e.g. an exhibition catalogue. The text must be written or edited by a journalist.

These items may also be disseminated via social media platforms if rights allow. This can increase our engagement with our users and foster their dialogue with us.

### 3.6.6 Audio

Especially for the national languages, the audio produced by the other units of SRG is an asset. Content acquired from other sources must clearly indicate the source.

The archives from Swiss Radio International also offer valuable audio material.

Wherever possible, the audio should also be generated in the mother tongue of the interviewee.

### 3.6.7 Videos

SWI swissinfo.ch videos are proprietary products or may be acquired or edited versions of videos published by other SRG units or from other sources. They can be used to complement articles or as standalone elements.

If a video is acquired from another SRG unit or another source, the source must be clearly declared.

Ideally, all videos on our platforms will be subtitled. All videos placed directly on social media must be subtitled, as must videos in which Swiss German is spoken.

The same validation procedure as for other elements applies to editorial preparation of videos.

The VJs are responsible for ensuring that the rights to video material being republished have been clarified and documented.