

Tips for Journalists in Times of War



Journalist's Physical Safety

- 1** **Key advice — no story is worth your life.** Try to stay out of hell. This advice applies most of all to videographers and photographers because they try to capture footage that conveys the atmosphere of the event as fully as possible, and they often go to the front lines to do so. But there is no immunity for journalists in this war — the death toll in the first 40 days only confirms this: the "press" inscription does not save under artillery bombardment.
- 2** Be sure to learn the theory about the types of mines, shells and other ammunition that can detonate, and how to keep yourself safe from fire and explosions. [You can do this here.](#) The same applies to first aid. Its basics, as well as the basics of a journalist's own safety, can be found [here](#).
- 3** Practice putting on a tourniquet in a state of dizziness beforehand (you have to put it on in 20 seconds). Dizziness can be provoked with a continuous series of exercises and rotation around your own axis. For example, 20 squats, push-ups, abs exercises.
- 4** Build your own first aid kit. Here, the below principle applies: When giving aid, use the first aid kit of the victim or injured person. That is, if there are no bandages in your first aid kit, they will not be applied to you. You can use the [list](#) to build your own basic first aid kit.
- 5** Before leaving for the job site, find out from the press officers where you can and cannot go: the area nearby may be mined, there may be tripwires or unexploded ordnance. Ask where the shelter is and how shelling warning is given (for example, by shouting "Exit!").
- 6** Always work only with verified drivers, use reliable fixers, and don't pick anyone up on the road to "drop off" at the nearest town.
- 7** Just like the driver, the vehicle must also be reliable: Check whether there are any problems in its operation, in the serviceability of devices, or whether the car runs on LPG (for safety reasons, LPG cars are prohibited in the war zone). And always have spare wheels and extra fuel with you. If possible, it is better to work with two cars: if something happens to the first one, you will have the opportunity to get into the other one and leave.

8

A journalist cannot be a combatant. If you take up arms, you lose your status as a journalist. You can find out more about the journalist status [here](#).

9

Do not pick up any attention-grabbing things, as they may be booby-trapped or treated with poison. Do not enter rooms that have not been searched by the bomb squad.

10

Remember that you can be taken prisoner if you are at the site of direct combat.

- Before you go to the scene, make sure that photos and documents from your phone are automatically uploaded to file sharing sites. Delete any photos, documents from your phone transferring them to other media before that. Take a regular push-button cell phone with you too.
- Set a strong password for your phone (other than FaceID or fingerprint). This is important, because in captivity your face and your fingerprints can be forcibly used to unlock the phone.
- You must keep in touch with a reliable person at all times and share your geolocation with them. Agree on a course of action with this person in case they cannot get hold of you for a long time. Agree on a code word you will use if you are texting each other.
- Write down the phone number of the contact person and your blood type on a piece of paper — in case your phone breaks down and you forget the number, or if you are found unconscious.

11

Do not take orders in war zones as a freelancer, because the big media companies often do not want to send their correspondents because of the danger, and instead hire freelancers who do not have the necessary equipment, insurance or additional support from these media.

Information and psychological security

1

Verify what seems obviously true as well: photos, videos, information that "everyone" is talking about. Don't be tempted to follow a well-known narrative. An emotional photo of a girl in front of her mother may turn out to be a still image from a movie.

2

How do you check your sources of information? You can use the ANICE system, which defines the following criteria for the source:

- Authoritative (i.e. meaning it has a good reputation, many people cite it),
- Named (i.e. it clearly states the name of the person, the media that transmits this information),
- Independent (unbiased, disinterested in making excuses for someone),
- Corroborated (facts provided by a source corroborated by other sources or experts),
- Evidence (meaning there is irrefutable evidence, e.g., video, photos, audio evidence).

3

Even if your source seems reliable, try checking a few more sources that cover this information.

4

Think about whether the photos you took really need to be published for the sake of getting the information right, or will it be just a matter of satisfying the curiosity of your audience?

- Tell the story of the photos you took. State clearly what exactly is happening in the photo.
- Do not publish photos that can identify the dead Ukrainian servicemen and servicewomen. This can be traumatic for their loved ones. Likewise, do not publish photos of dead civilians until the deaths of people in a particular region are officially reported. Ask permission from the relatives of the deceased to publish photos with them. You can also find out how to properly cover information about war victims [here](#).

5

Take care of your mental health.

- Traumatic images are like radiation: Their influence is invisible only up to a point. Journalists should take care of their mental health and, like nuclear power plants workers, undergo rehabilitation.
- Interact with such materials as little as possible. When working on sensitive content for the first time, make text notes so you don't have to review it again.
- Don't share such materials with your colleagues without a disclaimer about the sensitive content.

6

How do you communicate with emotionally unstable respondents?

- Ask permission to communicate. It is important to remember that you are forcing them to relive the horrific events.
- Take a few minutes to get to know each other, sit next to the person. Help them get to a place where they will be relatively safe.
- You should immediately explain how you will use the information, show that you have a microphone in your hands and a camera behind you.
- Let them know that the information they provide is incredibly valuable and their emotions are important.

7

If the military or intelligence agencies tell you that something is not allowed to be covered, it is so because it may be a military secret or information beneficial to the enemy. Listen to their instructions. In addition, Law [No. 2160-IX](#) adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on March 24, prohibits the dissemination of any information on the relocation, movement or location of the Ukrainian military, as well as the direction, movement of weapons, armaments and ammunition. Violation of these rules is punishable by imprisonment from 3 to 12 years.

At the same time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs asks the media community and civilians not to film the following:

- Missiles flying or hitting somewhere;
- Street names, public transport stops, shops, factories;
- Anti-aircraft warfare;
- Places where shells were fired or hit;
- Addresses, visual reference or coordinates of battles;
- License plate numbers of vehicles, armored vehicles;
- Victims or dead (except for official data).

8

In your journalistic material, try to avoid generalizing labels or terminology the true meaning of which is not always easy to understand, such as "terrorist". Often such labels or "simplifications" only complicate the correct understanding of the text. You can also find out information on how to cover the war [here](#).

9

Don't cover people or organizations in your stories that could be targets in a conflict. For example, those working with the military.

10

In cases of kidnapping, hostage-taking, sieges, bombings, or other similar events, remember: Everything you broadcast can be seen or heard by the enemy. As an editor, keep a close eye on the messages in such stories.

11

It is important to remain human first and foremost, and not turn into a machine. For example, CNN journalist Clarissa Ward first helped the elderly ([7:36](#)) carry their belongings while crossing the destroyed bridge in Irpin, and only then went back to the microphone and reported on the events.

