

# Covering Coronavirus Constructively

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**Recommendations for reporting on the coronavirus with the elements of constructive journalism in mind.**

Journalism is a filter between reality and the public perception of reality and must journalists ask themselves if they want to angle only on the drama or also on nuances, perspectives and hope.

The time is now to show why journalism is essential to audiences, society and democracy. The corona virus pandemic is a global call for responsible media.

Constructive journalism is a mindset which places the focus of journalism and public attention to beyond the glare of global problems and addresses potential solutions to the challenges facing us all.

Constructive journalism is as an add on to the two major modes of news reporting: Breaking news and investigative news.

It goes without saying that both breaking news and investigative news are essential for covering the pandemic of the coronavirus. In this grave international crisis, they are absolutely necessary in order to inform people around the world and hold the people in power responsible for their actions, or lack of action, with critical journalism.

In what way could the principles of constructive journalism offer additional elements to reporting on the corona virus?

Constructive journalism is based on three pillars and here are some recommendations on how these principles could be used in covering the evolving pandemic.

Some of the recommendations may seem to be simply good, thorough, critical and balanced journalism but that is essentially what constructive journalism is all about.

## STORIES FROM PILLAR 1:

Focus on solutions

**Report not only on the problems but also on possible solutions to these problems.**

Examples:

[Link: Forbes](#)

[Link: New York Times](#)

[Link: Washington Post](#)

[Link: PRI](#)

[Link: TV2 Østjylland](#)

[Link: Nature](#)

## STORIES FROM PILLAR 2:

### Cover nuances

1. Balance and nuance your reporting. Do tell the necessary stories of the severe problems but also tell the stories about progress, if it is there.

[Link: TV2](#)

2. Make sure to use the right sources, i.e. experts who know what they are talking about.

In other words: Always go for the people who know what they are talking about. Don't settle for less.

3. Don't fall into the pitfall of asking people who are famous for something totally different and who know nothing about coronavirus.

[Link here](#)

4. Consider how much reporting you should do.

It goes without saying that in the current, severe crisis, a lot of reporting is extremely necessary.

But the emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity. Prioritize facts over feelings. Ask yourself if the particular angle you have in mind is necessary and actually has value for your audiences.

The United Nations health organization, WHO, sent out this appeal to news media in the beginning of March:

"To members of the media: Yours is a critical role. This is the time for accurate reporting from official sources. Your role in an outbreak is not simply to chase the story; it is to perform a public service. Your actions are public health actions in every respect. You play a significant part in protecting the health and well-being of your fellow citizens."

This corresponds with the advice that WHO sent out to the citizens:

"Minimize watching, reading or listening to news that causes you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information only from trusted sources and mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts; not the rumors and misinformation. Gather information at regular intervals, from WHO website and local health authorities' platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumors. Facts can help to minimize fears."

5. Make sure that the case you use is representative of a documented development and not a unique and extraordinary example.

6. Pick your pictures with caution

It is self-evident that a picture can tell a whole story. But what story should we tell when the pictures can tell all kinds of stories, ranging from gloomy scary pictures of people wearing white face masks to images showing people taking precautions by washing hands? Consider what signals you want to send.

## 7. Mind your language

Be calm in your tone. If you exaggerate with your words and phrases you might exaggerate the state of fear that you leave people with. Consider this: What good does it do?

## 8. Put your reporting into perspective

The reporter should naturally always strive to put the single story into perspective, both internationally, historically, and comparatively. This is particularly important with a disease that can be fatal to some. Ask the questions: How can we compare this disease to previous pandemics?

Why do different countries apply different strategies? Why do different countries have relatively different numbers of infected citizens and mortality rates? Perspective matters.

## 9. Try to learn more and embrace complexity

It goes without saying that a reporter should strive to have an in-depth understanding about the subject that he is reporting on. However, the time pressure in newsrooms often challenges this ideal.

## 10. Base your journalism on facts and be particularly aware that facts may change every day.

Naturally, any story must be based on facts. However, in this case the facts are rapidly changing as numbers shift by the hour. Get it right. Every time. Try to find the facts that are essential and easy to understand.

## STORIES FROM PILLAR 3:

### Promote Democratic Conversation

#### 1. Involve and engage people

[Link: SVT](#)

#### 2. Use different platform to reach out to people

Find ways to communicate to different target groups. Consider working together with actors, musicians, and influencers in order to spread pieces of advice and useful information.

#### 3. Getting people answers to their questions

[Link: TV2 Fyn](#)

## Summing up:

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Constructive journalism is and add on to breaking news and investigative news. We need to remember the purpose of journalism: To contribute to society through critical and constructive journalism. Please share your constructive stories with us by sending them to [info@constructiveinstitute.org](mailto:info@constructiveinstitute.org).