

English & Drama – How was 9/11 represented in the media and other accounts?

## BBC editorial guidelines – extracts

### War, Terror and Emergencies

The BBC has a special responsibility to its UK and international audiences when reporting conflict including wars, acts and planned acts of terror, sieges and emergencies.

### Introduction



Large numbers of people across the world access our services for accurate news and information. They also expect us to help them make sense of events by providing context and impartial analysis and by offering a wide range of views and opinions.

At such times, when there may be conflicting information and opinions, and with reliable information hard to come by, we need to be scrupulous in applying our principles of accuracy and impartiality.

The tone of our reporting is as important as its reliability. We need to be sensitive to the emotions and fears of our audience when reporting matters involving risk to and loss of life, as well as human suffering or distress. Some will have relatives or friends directly involved. We will need to handle painful stories with great care. We should avoid causing unnecessary offence whilst also ensuring we continue to convey the reality of events and do not unduly sanitise our reporting.

### Principles

- Our reports of war, terror, emergencies and similar events must meet the Editorial Guidelines' Principles on Accuracy and Impartiality.
- We will respect human dignity without sanitising the realities of war, terror, emergencies and similar events. There must be clear editorial justification for the use of very graphic pictures.
- We will ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, that next of kin do not learn of a relative's death or injury from any of our content.



Find out more by visiting:  
[www.since911.com](http://www.since911.com)



---

**English & Drama – How was 9/11 represented in the media and other accounts?**

---

**Accuracy and impartiality**

When reporting war, and in the early stages of covering national and international emergencies (including acts of terror, disasters and major accidents), it is particularly important to give the source of information and material from third parties, particularly when there are conflicting claims. First estimates of casualty figures often turn out to be inaccurate. If different sources give different estimates we should either report the range or go for the source which carries the greatest authority and attribute the estimate accordingly.

We should normally say if our reports are censored or monitored or if we withhold information, and explain, wherever possible, the rules under which we are operating.

When reporting demonstrations, disturbances and similar events, we should treat estimates of involvement with due scepticism, report wide disparities and name the sources of the figures. We aim to offer a comprehensive and impartial view of events. When it is difficult for reporters located on one side of a confrontation to form a clear overall view, their material should be put into a wider context for broadcast.

**Use of Language**

We must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Terrorism is a difficult and emotive subject with significant political overtones and care is required in the use of language that carries value judgements. We try to avoid the use of the term “terrorist” without attribution. When we do use the term we should strive to do so with consistency in the stories we report across all our services and in a way that does not undermine our reputation for objectivity and accuracy.

The word “terrorist” itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as “bomber”, “attacker”, “gunman”, “kidnapper”, “insurgent”, and “militant”. We should not adopt other people’s language as our own; our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom.

For similar reasons, it is also usually inappropriate to use, without attribution, terms such as “liberate”, “court martial” or “execute” in the absence of a clear judicial process.

**A full version of the guidelines can be found at:**

**[www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-war-introduction/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-war-introduction/)**

---

**Find out more by visiting:**  
[www.since911.com](http://www.since911.com)

