Legal Definitions & Public Policies

- [Sexual assault](Justice Dept.)
- [Sexual harassment](EEOC)
- [Rape](FBI; see also its [FAQ](#))
- [RAINN](#): Search laws in your state

Language Matters

You can reframe the conversation while maintaining good journalistic practices. Both the specific vocabulary and general conversation around sexual assault are changing, so keep your ears and eyes open.

- “Survivor” is generally preferred over “victim,” but be conscious of the language a victim/survivor uses. Don’t put words in their mouth.
- When possible, use “reported rape” instead of “alleged.”
● Avoid using “accuser” to describe a reported victim. That reinforces the notion that the real problem is women making false accusations, not men raping women.

● Pay close attention to language that perpetuates inaccurate ideas of what constitutes rape or assault. Remember:
  ○ Force is not always physical.
  ○ 70% of sexual assaults are committed by somebody known to the victim.
  ○ All rape is violence. Rape is not sex.

● Yellow flags: Brave, trauma(tized), tragic, violent, forcible, alleged, accused, affair, scandal, convicted.

● Question who is left behind. Assault and harassment are not just experienced by women, or white people, or able-bodied people, etc.

● Question the motives of a story, as well as its structure. Are the facts well defined? Does the story seek to speak the truth, or does it seek to further a writer’s agenda (or a publication’s agenda)? Can it withstand a lawsuit?

● Avoid language that infantilizes women. Apply the Finkbeiner test.

What You Can Do

● Begin conversations with your boss and with other editors about the tone your publication is setting, and establish a process that allows people an “out” when they need one.

● When applicable, triage: Set priorities for stories so you can more easily spread the work around, and make sure that editors whose identities match the victims don’t shoulder all of those stories.

● Be a warrior for the next generation: If you experienced, for example, workplace harassment at a time when there was no recourse, don’t dismiss it as a hazing ritual everybody endured.

● Take care of yourself! Nearly all of us have been affected in some way by sexual violence, and writing and editing about it can be re-traumatizing and downright exhausting.
  ○ Take a walk, talk to a friend, talk to a therapist, look at pictures of baby llamas, watch paint-mixing videos or cookie-icing videos, do 10 jumping jacks, try square breathing.
Additional Resources
Reporting on sexual violence, Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma
Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)

Further Reading & Listening


