

How to Cover Young People Effectively: Ideas from 18- to 24-year-olds

University of Kansas journalism students met in March 2007 to talk about how mainstream news media cover their generation. Then, they came up with advice on how to do a better job. Their suggestions may seem simple or even obvious – just good solid journalism. But, from these students' perspective, they don't see it enough in the news media.

Here are the four tests for good coverage*

Be Real. Focus on issues and stories beyond just what is exceptional – exceptionally good *or* exceptionally bad. Talk to people who are real. Don't cover fakes or people who manufacture their emotions.

Be Connected. Make the effort to understand issues from young people's perspective. Don't impose the perspectives of older people to judge what young people think and do. Produce stories from the inside looking out, rather than the outside looking in. (One example: If you're doing a story about texting, do the reporting by texting your sources.)

Dig Deep. Don't take young people's actions at face value. Ask "why," rather than stop with the easy-to-see actions or negative behavior. Get to the specifics of what's going on; don't rely on generalizations.

Be Fair. Acknowledge the range of values and behaviors that exist among young people. For example, acknowledge those with a strong work ethic rather than simply focus on slackers. Recognize how reporting can feed and reinforce unfair stereotypes.

** Developed by J201 students, Professor Kerry Benson's class on Journalism and Youth Culture. March 5, 2007, Covering Communities Symposium.*