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Three steps to an AI-ready newsroom:

A practical guide to responsible policies

Thomson Reuters Foundation

Protecting journalism in the AI age means adopting it responsibly. This practical starter guide is designed to help newsrooms identify ethical risks in their AI applications and take action to mitigate these.
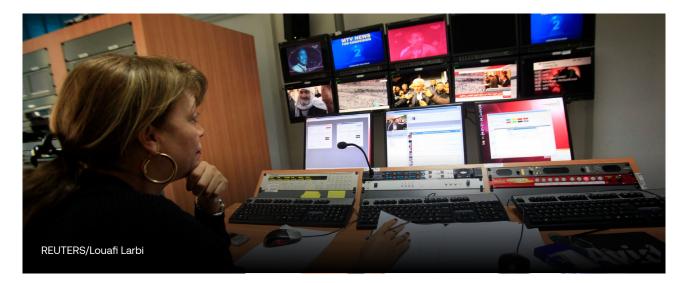
It is intended as a starting point for ongoing conversations within your organisation on how to use AI while upholding journalistic values—accuracy, fairness, transparency, and accountability. These principles serve as essential pillars for informed communities worldwide, allowing journalism to fulfil its vital role in society.

How to use this guide

Each step in this guide builds on the previous one, helping you move from understanding your current AI usage to implementing responsible practices:

01.
Begin by taking stock of AI tools already in use in your newsroom

02.
Identify the common risks these tools pose to journalistic standards, and come up with solutions to address them

03.
Establish ongoing monitoring to ensure continuous improvement

We recommend involving journalists, editors, and technical staff in this process to ensure capturing diverse perspectives.

REUTERS/Louafi Larbi

Step 1: Identify your AI tools

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Before diving into the steps, let's define what we mean by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the context of newsrooms. In simple terms, AI refers to computer systems that are designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. In newsrooms, this includes tools for transcription, translation, content editing, summarisation, and data analysis among others.

The most widely used tools recently are Generative AI platforms like ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, and Claude that can produce text and/or visuals based on specific prompts. You probably already use many other tools with AI integrations without realising it, like spell-checkers that suggest writing improvements or transcription features that convert speech to text, or even simple features in Microsoft Excel that can help organise your data.

Understanding what constitutes AI will help you take inventory of the AI tools already in use in your newsroom. Think about:

- What AI tools are newsroom staff using?
- For what purposes are they being used?
- How frequently are they being used?
- Do any guidelines currently exist?
- Who is responsible for overseeing their use?

Once you've identified the tools being used by your staff, you're ready to progress to the next step in this guide.

REUTERS/Omar Sobhani

Step 2: Map the risks and solutions

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After completing your audit of AI tools, it's time to look at the specific risks these tools can pose and how you can mitigate them. Your approach to AI adoption needs to match your specific needs and challenges, so one-size-fits-all solutions won't work. Here are some suggestions for addressing common AI use cases.

In our research, we found that over 55% of journalists are using AI tools like Grammarly or ChatGPT to polish their writing or translate copy. While these editing assistants can be helpful, they do come with risks—plagiarism and factual errors might be introduced. Your solution could be introducing clear guidelines to your journalists and editors, noting that any AI-enhanced text should always be reviewed by a human editor who can check for factual accuracy, while ensuring originality and proper attribution.

For newsrooms creating specialised AI assistants (e.g., Custom GPTs, Claude Projects, Copilot Agents), clearly instruct these tools with journalistic standards. For example, you might instruct an AI assistant with the following: "You're helping our investigative team. Always prioritise source protection and flag potential ethical issues". Your solution should also address protecting information shared with free AI tools, which may be stored on external servers and used to train their models. You can establish clear guidelines—for instance, prohibiting the uploading of unpublished drafts, source identities, or confidential documents to external AI platforms.

On the next page is a simplified example mapping common newsroom AI tools, their associated risks, and practical solutions. This is just for illustration—you can download an empty template to create your own customised risk assessment.

REUTERS/Joe Skipper

ⓘ **Example: AI risk & solution mapping**

AI application	How it's used	Main risks	Solutions
Text generation (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Claude)	Creating summaries or first drafts of routine stories like market updates or weather reports	• AI might make up facts or "hallucinate" information • AI might copy existing content without attribution • Stories may lose their unique voice or perspective	• Tell readers when AI helped create content • Always have a human editor review AI-written text • Use plagiarism checkers on AI outputs • Clearly attribute information
Recommendation algorithims within your website	Systems that suggest "more stories you might like" to readers	• Readers only see content that reinforces their existing views, creating "filter bubbles" • Algorithms tend to promote content that gets clicks rather than what's newsworthy • Reader data gets collected without proper consent	• Regularly review what the algorithm recommends • Mix editor-selected stories with algorithm recommendations • Let readers choose different types of content recommendations • Explain to readers how and why stories are recommended to them
Data analysis for investigations	Using AI to sort through large document sets or data leaks	• Exposing confidential sources through data handling • AI finds patterns that aren't actually meaningful • Accidentally revealing private information in stories	• Store sensitive data on secure, offline systems • Double-check AI findings using traditional reporting methods • Create specific rules for handling sensitive information

➤ **Download the template**

Step 3: Integrate AI guidelines into your editorial policies

Look at your existing editorial policies as a foundation for thoughtfully incorporating ethical AI considerations in your newsroom workflows. Some newsrooms maintain both integrated guidelines and a separate AI policy document.

When updating policies, be specific about AI's role in each section. For example, in your newsgathering section, include practical protocols for how reporters should (or should not) use AI research tools, what verification steps they must follow, and how to document AI assistance. If you're using AI for fact-checking, map exactly where these tools fit in your workflow, noting their strengths and limitations—whether they're commercial solutions or custom-built tools.

Review any country/regional policies that might apply to your AI use. Many countries are developing or updating data protection laws that could affect how you collect, store and process information with AI tools. Adding a simple step in your process to review relevant regulations in your region can help you avoid potential legal issues down the road.

What's next | Monitor, evaluate and adapt

Once you've mapped your AI risks and solutions, it's important to share this with everyone in your newsroom and assign owners to different AI use cases to continually monitor, evaluate, and adapt as the technology evolves. Schedule regular check-ins (e.g., quarterly) to:

- Review existing and new AI tools being used in your newsroom
- Assess how well your ethical solutions are working
- Update policies/guidelines based on emerging ethical concerns
- Share lessons learned across departments
- Document feedback from staff
- Create clear testing protocols before deploying new AI tools
- Maintain logs of all issues encountered and how they were resolved.

By developing responsible AI practices now, your newsroom will be better positioned to adapt to future technological developments while maintaining trust with your audience. This balanced approach allows you to benefit from AI's capabilities while maintaining the human judgment, ethics, and accountability that make journalism valuable to society.

This resource was developed by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, based on insights from our research and training programmes for newsrooms in the Global South. It builds on our 2025 TRF Insights report, *Journalism in the AI Era: Opportunities and challenges in the Global South and emerging economies*, which explored how our global community of journalists are navigating AI adoption.

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