

# PBS Standards

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## Be Transparent About Corrections

Even when exercising great care, factual errors can still occur. When there's an error, the [PBS Editorial Standards](#) require that producers publicly issue a correction “in a timely manner that is abundantly clear to the audience.” Errors should be treated seriously on any platform where they occur—including on broadcast, online, and on social media.

PBS's commitment to correcting errors is extremely important for upholding the core editorial principles of transparency and accountability and for preserving and building audience trust. In a [2018 Gallup/Knight Foundation survey](#), 86 percent of respondents said that correcting errors quickly and openly was “very important” for determining whether a news organization could be trusted.

PBS Standards & Practices recommends that all corrections should (1) briefly explain the error, providing the audience with important context; and (2) provide the corrected information in a straightforward manner that is easy for the audience to understand.

More specifically, corrections on PBS platforms should be implemented as follows:

**Broadcast / Digital Video.** At a minimum, a correction should appear on the webpages where the video is posted (e.g., PBS.org, YouTube) and as close to the applicable video as possible (ideally, in a prominent caption underneath the video where the audience can view the program). If the video will be rebroadcast, the error must be corrected within the content and acknowledged in the production credits (e.g., “CORRECTION: A previous version of this program mistakenly stated ...”).

**Articles on PBS.org.** Errors should be corrected within the article, and a correction should be appended that explains what was wrong (e.g., “CORRECTION: An earlier version of this article mistakenly stated...”). The correction generally should appear at the top of the article, although more minor errors (such as misstating a historical date) can appear at the bottom.

**Social Media.** Despite the informal and fast-paced nature of social media, the PBS Editorial Standards state that errors “should be treated as seriously as when they occur on other distribution platforms.” Given the unique and evolving nature of various social media platforms, PBS does not prescribe a blanket approach to handling corrections. In general, however, erroneous social media posts should not simply be deleted as if they never occurred. Instead, posting a screenshot of the error is generally recommended. This practice maintains a public record of the error, upholding the principle of transparency; provides important context for the correction; and minimizes the possibility that the erroneous information will be further disseminated.

- On Twitter, for example, a correction generally should involve (1) taking a screenshot of the erroneous tweet; (2) deleting the erroneous tweet to prevent the error from continuing to circulate; and (3) posting a correction that embeds a

screenshot of the erroneous (and now deleted) tweet. The tweet should begin with “CORRECTION:” and should then briefly: (a) explain the error; (b) provide correct information; and (c) state that the previous tweet has been deleted (e.g., “We have deleted the erroneous tweet.”).

- In limited instances, a correction may be issued by replying to the erroneous social media post with “CORRECTION,” instead of taking a screenshot and deleting the post, in order to preserve public discourse and commentary on the original post.
- For minor typos and broken links, it may be appropriate to simply delete the erroneous tweet and then post a new tweet that fixes the error. While not required, this tweet may include a brief parenthetical at the end stating the reason for deleting the original tweet (e.g., “The original tweet misspelled the word ‘broken’ and has been deleted,” or “The original tweet included a broken link and has been deleted.”)

**Editor’s Notes & Clarifications.** It may be appropriate to acknowledge a journalistic or editing oversight that does not consist of a factual error, e.g., omitting context that might have aided the audience’s understanding of an issue. In these instances, the labels “EDITOR’S NOTE” or “CLARIFICATION” can be used. However, these labels should be used judiciously; they should not be used as euphemisms for corrections.

**If you have any questions, please contact PBS Standards & Practices at: [standards@pbs.org](mailto:standards@pbs.org)**