

# Activities

## Essay questions

1. Choose between one and three examples of reporting about violence against women from your local media in recent months. Compare these to the the national guidelines, *How to report on violence against women and their children* (Our Watch), and/or the Australian Press Council Guideline, and discuss the following:

Did the reporting meet the guideline(s)? In what way? And/or how did it fall short? What barriers might the journalist(s) have faced in reporting the story? Are the guidelines adequate to assist reporters to do a good job of reporting VAW, and if not why not?

2. When the Herald Sun launched its campaign against domestic violence, “Take a Stand” in 2013, it chose to launch it with front page statements from what were described as “Victoria’s Most Powerful Men”. The men pictured were the then police commissioner, Ken Lay, the then Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Robert Doyle, the then Premier, Dennis Napthine and then CEO of AFL football, Andrew Demetriou.

What are the arguments for and against using men only to launch a campaign of this sort? What other approaches might have been considered, and what would be their strengths and disadvantages?

3. Look at the ABC’s coverage of the Margaret River murder-suicide at this link: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-14/margaret-river-murder-suicide-peter-miles-pain-behind-killings/9756918>

Imagine you are a member of the Australian Press Council and you have received a complaint about this article on the grounds that it excuses the perpetrator of the crime. Write an adjudication, referring to relevant readings.

4. Read the following paper:

Sheridan-Burns, Lynette and McKee, Alan (1999). Reporting on Indigenous Issues: some practical suggestions for improving journalistic practice in the coverage of indigenous affairs. *Australian Journalism Review*, 21(2) pp. 103-116.

Write an essay reflecting on how these suggestions interact with the national guidelines, *How to report on violence against women and their children* (Our Watch). To what extent should the history of violent dispossession be regarded as a causal factor in domestic violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? Argue for your opinions, referring to readings and examples where appropriate.

5. In the introduction to their book, *Journalists, sources, and credibility: New perspectives* (2011), Franklin and Carlson ask “what would it take to believe news of a dragon?”

They use this question to reflect on how sourcing works. We are more likely to believe people who are prepared to be named. We seek verification from other sources. We are more likely to believe powerful people, or those who have a record of credibility in the public eye.

Write an essay reflecting on how the issue of sourcing and ideas about the credibility of sources has impacted on VAW as a news issue.

6. The #metoo movement against sexual harassment has seen social media interact with journalism. The mainstream media has reported on the movement, as well as conducting investigative reporting into alleged perpetrators of sexual harassment, which has in turn fuelled the social media campaign.

Write an essay reflecting on the role of professional journalism and social media. Consider, with reference to relevant readings, whether the media would have reported so extensively on sexual harassment without the #metoo social media movement.

7. A journalist must always get both sides of the story. Therefore, in reporting family violence, they must try to get the perpetrator's point of view as well as that of the victim.

Is this true? What are the obligations and responsibilities of a journalist in this situation, and what are the challenges they face?

8. Some people have suggested that men are being stereotyped as 'dangerous' and as all perpetrators because of a few violent men. This response is abbreviated as "not all men" – which has become a hashtag. Is this a reasonable response to the social problem of family violence? Argue for your answer with reference to the readings.

## News writing assignments

1. Write a 1500-word background article about what action governments are taking to address family violence. You can focus on any level of government – local, state or federal. You can choose any aspect of the issue – funding for refuges, primary prevention, education of young people or something else.

Interview at least one representative or spokesperson for government, as well as at least two relevant stakeholders, such as representatives of the domestic violence sector in your area, survivors, police or lawyers who deal with the issue, or other relevant community leaders.

2. What are the main political parties' policies on family violence, and what do the experts in the field think about them? You can consider either state or federal politics in answering this question. Access any relevant policy documents, seek interviews with the relevant spokespeople for the political parties and interview at least one sector representative or other expert.

**Either** write an informative feature of up to 1500 words, **or** present the information in the form of a listicle or Q&A format.

3. Attend a court hearing that concerns allegations of family violence. Write a 600-word court report.
4. Write a 600-word breaking news story about family violence and/or violence against women. Interview at least two people. Consult your tutor about your idea for the news story before approaching anyone for interview and proceed with care.

## Exercises Suitable for Seminars and Tutorials

1. Write a listicle suitable for publication on BuzzFeed, on the theme “five things you didn’t know about family violence”.

Familiarise the class with the format of listicles – a good Wikihow can be found here: <https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Listicle>

Either split the class into groups, or devise the listicle drawing on the whole class. What are the most important points? How can they be put cogently and briefly? What kinds of GIFs would make suitable illustrations?

Refer the class to the Our Watch guidelines. Does the listicle adhere to these guidelines? For example, have sources of help been included?

Make changes as necessary.

2. Barometer Activity about gender-based violence

In a barometer activity, students listen to a statement and then stand up and move to a point between “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree” that reflects their opinion. Begin by stating the prompt, then allow students to find their place on the continuum. After all students have moved, ask a few to explain why they chose that position. If they feel so moved by the discussion, let them change their place on the barometer and explain why they did so. You may also want students to prepare their answers in writing before engaging in the discussion.

Some possible prompts include:

- Stereotypes about men and women are harmful.
- It’s hard to tell the difference between sexual harassment and flirting.
- Men are less able to control their emotions than women
- Family violence would stop if men and women had equality in the workplace
- The media is giving too much attention to family violence
- It’s wrong to expect all men to take responsibility for family violence

3. FixedIt Activity

This activity is based on journalist Jane Gilmore’s #FixedIt project: <http://janegilmore.com/tag/fixedit/>

Hand out examples of recent reporting of family violence from the media. Either in groups or as a class, have the students highlight words, phrases and sections of the article they think could be improved upon and fix it. Discuss the results.

4. Objectivity

Present students with recent news stories concerning family violence. Do the stories meet the test of objectivity? Do they blame the victim or excuse the perpetrator? How? Get students to identify the precise words and phrases that convey the meanings.

5. Victim / perpetrator / relationship exercise

- Draw three columns on the white board titled Victim, Perpetrator and Relationship.
- Ask the students to offer suggestions and add responses to the appropriate column based on what they hear, see or read in the media. Or provide a recent media article (or one of the articles provided in this curriculum) for students to examine. Ask them to identify language used about victim, perpetrator and the relationship
- For example, if they say, “why doesn’t she just leave” add this to the Victim column.
- Here are some examples:

Victim	Perpetrator	Relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— she provoked him</li> <li>— She was abused as a child</li> <li>— She chooses the wrong men</li> <li>— She cheated on him</li> <li>— She’s a bad mum for exposing her kids to that</li> <li>— She is a difficult woman</li> <li>— She nagged him</li> <li>— Why doesn’t she leave?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— He’s under a lot of stress</li> <li>— He had a violent upbringing</li> <li>— He’s a good dad</li> <li>— He is a good provider</li> <li>— He is a good community man</li> <li>— He is a great carer for her</li> <li>— He didn’t even hit her</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— They are a ‘volatile’ couple</li> <li>— A ‘tumultuous’ relationship</li> <li>— They are just as bad as each other</li> <li>— It’s a private issue</li> <li>— It’s just a domestic</li> <li>— It’s a toxic relationship</li> <li>— “Just two people who can’t sort their differences”</li> <li>— She gives as good as she gets</li> </ul>

Once the brainstorm is finished, ask participants for common themes that run through each of the columns

- The VICTIM column is about ‘Blame’ – write BLAME above the column. Emphasise that violence is never the fault of the victim. Remind participants that women are most at risk of being seriously harmed or killed when they leave (particularly within 3 months).
- The PERPETRATOR column is about ‘Excusing’ or ‘Justifying’ his behaviour – write EXCUSES/JUSTIFICATION above the column. Emphasise there is no excuse for violence. Violence is not caused by alcohol, drugs, mental health, anger management issues. It is a purposeful, patterned series of behaviours exercised with choice. Some of these ‘risk factors’ put women and children at greater risk of harm, but the key driver of violence is gender inequality. Men are not innately more violent, but they may be socialized in such a way as to feel entitled to power and control. Emphasise that any culture which is characterized by gender inequality will have a problem with VAW.
- The RELATIONSHIP column ‘Normalises’ or ‘Neutralises’ blame for the violence – write NORMALISES/NEUTRALISES above the column. The statements either treat violence as ordinary relationship conflict or blames both parties involved rather than just the perpetrator. You can also say that the list ‘Individualises’ responsibility for preventing VAW. Rather it is a community responsibility.

Suggest to the students that they look at some of the examples provided in the example pack to detect the extent to which these words are reflected in the reporting.