

# Tips for covering a protest:

## **PRACTICE SITUATIONAL AWARENESS**

This may sound elementary, but in a chaotic situation it is harder to do in practice. Be aware of the groups and forces on the ground. Know in advance their dynamics, tendencies, and prior interactions with other groups and the press.

## **WORK IN TEAMS**

Put aside competitive pressure and form teams of journalists to look out for each other. Have one person in every group tasked with primarily maintaining an eye on the perimeter and for unexpected movement or action from within or near the crowd. Make sure you can always communicate with each other. Know entry and exit routes. Study a map of the city around the venue in advance, and know the entry and exit routes. During every situation, make a conscious effort to continually reappraise where the nearest entry and exit routes are.

## **IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS NEEDED**

Looking like a journalist is important to signal to others, including police, that you are there to observe--not participate--in events. Display your press credentials when required, and use whatever credentials you may have. But keep them inside a pocket or clothing to avoid having them grabbed or stolen.

## **MAINTAIN NEUTRALITY**

Acting like a journalist is important to signal that you are there to observe, not participate. Much like a referee on a soccer field, get close enough to the action to observe it, but avoid putting yourself in the field of play or between clashing participants. Do not respond to provocation. Attendees and protesters, both inside and outside the venues, may attempt to harass, intimidate, accost or even attack the press. Journalists must maintain their demeanor and practice awareness, avoidance, and escape techniques, rather than engaging with anyone in a verbal or hostile physical exchange.

## **OBEY POLICE ORDERS**

Journalists have no clear legal right to report on events beyond those rights afforded to all citizens. Police may also legally arrest journalists for either allegedly disobeying orders to move or for resisting arrest.

## **PROTECTIVE GEAR (GAS MASKS)**

We would normally recommend that journalists consider bringing well-fitting respirator masks to help protect against the use of pepper spray and tear gas masks.

## **NO TRESPASSING**

Don't trespass onto property that is clearly private or marked with a police line.

## **CARRY CASH**

If you're covering a demonstration or other event likely to result in arrests, keep \$50-100 cash in your pocket to purchase a bail bond.

## **NOTES**

If you're able, give your notes, memory card, etc. to another journalist who can get them back to your newsroom promptly.

## **CARRY A PHOTO ID**

Always keep a government-issued photo ID (in addition to a press pass) in your pocket. It may speed up your release from custody.

## **LEGAL AND POLICE CONTACTS**

Editors and news directors who routinely send reporters and photographers to cover stories likely to result in arrests should have phone numbers of criminal lawyers and bail bondsmen in major cities. Also, know the name and phone number of the police department spokesperson, who may be able to help.

## **PROTECTING YOUR INFORMATION**

Before covering a protest, consider what data you're bringing to the event, and what kinds of evidence you hope to take away. You also want to think about what would happen if any of that information left your custody. Depending on your situation, your devices might be lost, stolen, or confiscated by any number of groups — bystanders, demonstrators, authorities, and others. Ask yourself a few questions before attending the event:

1. Do you have any sensitive data on your devices?
2. How likely do you think it is that a third party could get access to your devices?
3. Who could get access to your devices, and what might they be able to do?
4. Do your web-connected devices have access to remote services, such as your email?
5. Are there sensitive details that you need to obscure before publication, such as the identities of those involved? Would it be acceptable for them to be seen by someone before publication?



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