

When you get into journalism, you will be dealing with sources. There'll be sources that are on the record, there'll be sources that are anonymous. In some sense, it doesn't make any difference between the two in this regard. You have to figure out whether or not your source is trustworthy, and really there's only a few ways to find out. The first and most important way is check out what they tell you. If they tell you and it turns out not to be true. If they tell you once ... if they take something once and it turns out not to be true, well, they could've made a mistake. If it happens again, then you start thinking, 'Well, wait a second.' This source may not be trustworthy, and so you just move on to another source.

Now, let me talk a little bit about anonymous sources. You see a lot of the use of anonymous sources in news a lot these days. You should be very skeptical when you run across anonymous sources being quoted in the paper or on TV. Not that you don't necessarily believe what they say, but there's certain questions you should ask. The first question you should ask about anonymous sources is "how do they know ... what they're saying?" That's the first question that any journalist should ask, or any person reading a newspaper that quotes anonymous sources or watching a TV news broadcast that quotes anonymous sources. The second thing is "what's the motivation for anonymous sources to retain this information?" You need to ask what the motivation is. One of the things I always do on political stories is to say, "Can we describe what this anonymous source's political affiliation is?" That helps you understand what their motivation might be. And the third thing is for reporters to try and tell readers or viewers as much as you can about the anonymous source without giving him or her away. One of the words I hate the most is the word "source." I'd much rather have, if it's an anonymous person, say it's an official, it's a person familiar with what transpired, it's a member of the legal team, (or) it's a member of the coaching staff ... whatever. Source tells me nothing.