



The Practical Guide to Libel Law

Neil J. Rosini

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The penalties for failing to learn the lessons of libel law are severe--a fact which is widely recognized by media professionals who are most at risk. Writers, print and broadcast journalists, film producers, and editors need a working knowledge of the law, in simple terms, with practical ways to avoid legal trouble. Attorney Neil Rosini meets that need with this practical handbook focusing on what the law is (and will likely be) and how media professionals can stay within its bounds. Rosini's unique three-step approach and lively presentation make a complex subject both entertaining and easy to understand. The book's first section, "What to Look For," shows the reader how to identify a libel. The rule here is straightforward: anything that damages reputation is potentially libelous notwithstanding the public or private status of the subject, or the quality or number of sources. The next section, "What Degree of Proof," discusses how much proof is necessary to support a potentially libelous statement. Through examples, the book demonstrates that a common-sense rule is usually the best: journalists must balance factors like the degree of potential damage to the subject, time pressures, the number and reliability of sources, the importance of the story, and the availability of corroboration, to determine whether proof is sufficient. In the third section, "What to Write," the book shows how to write a story to make the best use of available legal defenses. Simple precautions like changing the names and biographical details of subjects, or buttressing a story with references to legislative or judicial records, provide important legal advantages. The book begins by discussing the competing ideals of free speech and the protection of reputation and puts defamation suits in context. The book ends with "Quick Questions and Short Answers," plus a list of "17 Do's and Don'ts" for ready reference. Throughout the volume Rosini provides anecdotal examples which illustrate the rules and help them "sink in." The fact patterns, mostly taken from actual cases, involve a diverting group of private and public figures including a monkey scientist, the company behind the "97-pound weakling," Robin Williams, and Andy Rooney. Detailed footnotes and case citations also make this an indispensable resource for lawyers, academics, and students.

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