



Libel Law Quiz

Answer Key

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1. "True" is the correct answer

A person cannot successfully sue for libel unless he or she can show that a false statement identifies them. But be careful, a person can be identified even if they are not named (for example, physical description, job title, etc.).

2. "True" is the correct answer

As an editor of a print publication you are responsible for everything you publish whether you or your staff created it or not. In some cases, online media may be able to avoid liability for statements made by others.

3. "False" is the correct answer

While statements of "pure" opinion cannot be libelous, any statement that makes a false allegation of fact is potentially libelous, no matter where it is published or what it is labeled.

4. "False is the correct answer

Cartoonists can be successfully sued for libel if the cartoon contains false allegations of fact and a reasonable reader can claim that they did not know the cartoon was intended solely as a joke. The same rule applies to April Fools' issues, satire and other "joke" content.

5. "False" is the correct answer

Only false statements that seriously harm a person's reputation are libelous. False statements that cause no harm, or only minor harm, or that merely annoy or embarrass an individual cannot be the basis for a successful libel claim.

6. "True" is the correct answer

But be careful. Knowing something is true and proving it is true in court — which may be required — can be two separate things.

7. “False” is the correct answer

Unfortunately, there is no “magic” number of sources that will protect you from a successful libel claim. It is important to evaluate your sources both in terms of quantity and quality.

8. “True” is the correct answer

Contacting the subject of a news story not only helps ensure the story’s accuracy, but it also helps demonstrate that you acted reasonably and fairly in reporting the story.

9. “False” is the correct answer

Age is no shield to a libel claim.

10. “False” is the correct answer

While publishing an apology or retraction for inaccurate reporting is usually a good idea and may limit your financial liability, it will not completely shield you from being successfully sued for libel. Still, studies have shown that treating those who call to complain about your coverage with respect may be the single most important factor in avoiding a lawsuit.

“Test Your Knowledge of the First Amendment” was developed by the Student Press Law Center with a grant in 2005 from the Newspaper Association of America Foundation (now known as the News Media Alliance, newsmediaalliance.org). SPLC staff periodically review and update the quizzes.

