



Twenty tips for staying safe while covering protests

1. **Make sure people know where you are going and what you are covering before you go.** Ensure that someone is standing by in the event that you need help. Develop an emergency back up plan and share it in the event that you are arrested or injured (e.g., decide who you will call for legal assistance, identify where the hospital nearest to the protest site is.) Also, inventory what you bring with you in advance and leave a list with a friend (e.g., cellphone, camera, audio recorder.) You'll need as much detail as possible if you are trying to reclaim an item at the jail that's been taken from you.
2. **Identify an Emergency Contact in advance and call them if needed.** Memorize or write their number in Sharpie on your arm. The Emergency Contact might be an editor, adviser, parent, or spouse. Work out a plan in advance of what they will do in the event you are arrested or injured. Call and text them the moment that it appears things are escalating, because it may be hours before you can get access to a phone if you're jailed (and this provides a written record – with time stamp – of what is happening). Carry quarters in case the jail provides only a payphone. Use Twitter and other publicly accessible channels to get the word out widely so people will know where to look for you.
3. **Make sure you bring key safety equipment.** This includes a mask (at least one which will protect against coronavirus), a helmet, goggles, and a bottle of water or milk. You may also want to bring high-protein snacks, a portable phone charger and a small first aid kit.
4. **If you have specific health conditions which require medication or special care, be sure that it is listed and on your person.** If you are injured, EMTs need to know. Bring back up medication with you.
5. **Turn off your phone's fingerprint scanner and facial recognition.** You have the legal right not to give your password and police cannot compel you to open the phone with a fingerprint or facial scanner.
6. **Always work with a "buddy."** Although working alone might draw less attention to yourself as press, it is dangerous to attend a protest solo. Go with a fellow journalist so that you can watch out for each other.
7. **Wear conspicuous press credentials.** Create a credential for your publication (such as a laminated tag that has your picture, the name of the publication and "PRESS" in big, clear, visible letters.) Carry a photocopy of your press credentials and personal ID with you as well.
8. **Remember that you are a neutral observer.** Do not participate in the protest activities (including chanting). Wear clothes that will not confuse you with a protester (be sure your shirt doesn't have a slogan or signals membership in any group). Make sure that law

enforcement can identify you as a journalist and not confuse you or claim that you were a participating protester.

9. **Upload photos regularly and back up (or wipe) your data.** There are a number of stories of officials demanding or even physically confiscating reporters' notes, camera equipment or other work products. This is an extremely serious act and, as discussed below, there are important legal protections that may be available to you. In fact, you should rarely, if ever, voluntarily provide your work product to law enforcement or other officials. That's what things like subpoenas are for and there are means for legally contesting such demands. That said, if you are ordered to do so, be sure that you very clearly state your objections, letting the official know that you believe their order is unlawful and that your compliance is involuntary. That said, your cameras will be seized if you are arrested, and even if the memory cards are returned, images may have been (unlawfully) deleted. For all of these reasons, it is a good practice to send photos back to your newsroom (or Cloud) as you can when covering a volatile news event. Back-up your device before you go.
10. **Practice situational awareness.** Scan your surroundings constantly to monitor what's happening around you. Pay attention to not only the protesters and law enforcement officers in your immediate vicinity but also how crowds are moving. Keep an eye out for potential threats and always consider your escape route. Violence can break out easily in a protest. If a situation becomes dangerous, remember that your safety comes first and the story comes second.
11. **Never escalate a confrontation** by touching a police officer or directly disobeying a lawful order. Stay as calm and polite as possible.
12. **Immediately identify yourself as "press" in any interaction with law enforcement.** Identify yourself verbally and show your press credential. Attempt to deescalate any possible confrontation.
13. **Record any police encounter and go "live"** if your camera is wireless-enabled. Police often provide contradictory narratives of their encounters with reporters and having video evidence of any confrontation with police can make all the difference in holding law enforcement (as well as you) accountable. Use your available tech to record and broadcast encounters with police and ask others nearby to do the same.
14. **If you are stopped by law enforcement, ask immediately if you are under arrest.** If they do not say yes, then you are free to walk away. Do not provoke an unnecessary confrontation.
15. **Gather all the information you can about your arrest, assault or encounter (harassment)** — record or videotape the arrest if you can, make sure you know which police agency made the arrest and, if possible, get the names and badge numbers of all officers involved and of any witnesses. Write down the exact location and time of any encounter.
16. **If you are a minor (under 18) who has been taken to an adult jail, inform officials of your age immediately.** Juveniles may not legally be detained in adult facilities.

17. **Immediately ask for legal representation** once you are arrested. Do not respond to any questions (even if they seem benign) without an attorney present.
18. **Read the fine print** of anything you are asked to sign — and think very carefully before you sign a “post and forfeit” bond, because that means you are agreeing to admit what you’re charged with and waive a court appearance. Review anything with your attorney.
19. **Demand a court appearance** if you have been held for more than 24 hours without being taken before a judge or magistrate.
20. **When you are safe, contact the SPLC** to inform us of the incident and to strategize about potential next steps.