

Case 3: What should a group do after a public mistake?

The crew's recap caption blamed younger neighbors for a late start, but the event log shows the projector failed.

On your own Read What happened. Underline the caption and the time the projector failed. About 5 minutes.

Your role: You're the one who checks the log's times before the correction goes up. **New skill:** Correct a public mistake.



Gia and Jordy sit at a table with a laptop and a printed page.

What happened

It is Sunday at the edit desk. Caio, 24, edited a short recap of Friday's screening. The crew posted it on Saturday morning. Gia's caption, "Great night, once the younger crowd finally got organized," sounded believable, because a few people did arrive late.

Then Jordy checks the setup log. The projector failed at 5:40 p.m. The replacement was not running until 6:20, twenty minutes after everyone was seated. The log also says Anika and Dec helped carry chairs before the doors opened.

Anika sends the group a voice note asking why she and Dec are the problem in the post. Gia wants to take responsibility. Her first draft of a correction is mostly about how bad she feels, and the recap caption is still up.

Your question: What should the correction say, and what will the crew do differently next time?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example. Then write your first guess in the box. About 5 minutes.

Claim A claim is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence.

En español: afirmación

In this case: The caption claims the late start happened because “the younger crowd” was not organized. Jordy’s setup log checks that claim.

Correction A correction is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information.

En español: corrección

In this case: Gia edits the original caption, not just her story, so people who saw it learn what was wrong.

Accountability Accountability is owning a mistake and doing what you said you would do to fix it.

En español: rendición de cuentas

In this case: The crew names who fixes the caption, who contacts Anika and Dec, and who checks the next recap against the log.

Who is involved



Gia

Wrote the recap caption

“I wrote ‘once the younger crowd finally got organized.’ A few people did come in late, so it felt true. I never checked why we started late.”



Jordy

Kept the setup log on Friday

“My log says Anika and Dec were carrying chairs before doors opened. The caption turned them into the reason we started late.”

Before you look at the evidence, what should Gia's correction say first?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reading passage

When an explanation becomes blame

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Claim:** A claim is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence.
- **Correction:** A correction is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information.
- **Accountability:** Accountability is owning a mistake and doing what you said you would do to fix it.

The story: The log nobody opened

The crew's first neighborhood screening, the one saved from a cropped clip in Case 1, went ahead on Friday. On Saturday at 11:08 a.m., the crew posted a recap. Caio, 24, had edited the video. Gia, 21, wrote the caption: "Great night, once the younger crowd finally got organized." It seemed accurate to her in the loose way captions often do. A few people had arrived late, and the evening had started late, so the two facts fused into a cause.

On Sunday at the edit desk, Jordy opens the setup log. At 5:40 p.m., a projector failure was reported. At 6:00, attendees were seated. At 6:20, a replacement was connected, twenty minutes after the audience sat down. The final line notes that Anika and Dec, the two youngest people involved, carried chairs before the doors opened. Jordy writes in the chat that no one opened the log before posting, Jordy included.

Anika's voice note lands next: "We were helping you set up. Why are we the problem in this post?" Gia had already drafted a response, which was never posted: "Sorry if this came across wrong. We love our younger neighbors and would never want anyone to feel excluded." Rereading it, she recognizes the conditional "if" as a dodge. The draft also never mentions the projector.

❓ Stop and think. How did two true facts, a late start and some late arrivals, combine into a false claim?

Two jobs in one caption

The caption did two jobs at once. It explained the late start, and it assigned blame for it to a group of people. The first job is a **claim**, a statement that something is true that can be checked with evidence.

Two jobs in one caption, continued

Case 1 gave you the method: find the original source. The log is that source, and it replaces the caption's explanation with a mechanical one.

A **correction** is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information. A strong correction here has a clear order. It names the wrong claim, states what the log shows and places the fix where the original audience will see it. Caio's rule, fix the same post instead of burying it under a new one, follows from that last requirement.

Accountability is owning a mistake and doing what you said you would do to fix it. In practice, accountability becomes a list of named owners. Gia corrects the post. Caio keeps a visible correction note with the edit. Jordy adds a source check before publication. Each owner is a named person rather than the crew in general, so anyone can check later whether the work was done. Just as important is what accountability does not require. Anika should not have to comfort Gia or approve the correction in public. Jordy suggests offering Anika a private way to respond and then letting her decide what she thinks. Jordy also proposes a test of success that ignores view counts. Ask a few people who saw the first post why the screening started late. If they still say "the younger crowd," the fix failed.

 **Stop and think.** Why does accountability include limits on what the crew asks of Anika and Dec?

What research and professional codes add

A 2016 study of apologies found that acknowledging responsibility and offering repair mattered most among six elements (Lewicki et al., *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, April 6, 2016). Research on misinformation points the same way. A meta-analysis of 65 studies found that corrections work better when they explain what is true rather than simply denying the false claim (Walter and Murphy, *Communication Monographs*, May 15, 2018). Gia's draft offered neither an explanation nor a repair.

Journalists write the prominence rule into their ethics. The RTDNA code says ethical journalism requires "owning errors, correcting them promptly and giving corrections as much prominence as the error itself had" (RTDNA Code of Ethics, June 11, 2015). NPR's public editor describes naming the error, fixing it on the story and keeping a public list (NPR, October 21, 2022).

The film connection sharpens the stakes. In *Zootopia* (2016), Judy tells a press conference that a set of incidents has a biological explanation tied to one group, and Nick's reaction shows a personal cost her official answer overlooks. In our reading, good intentions do not erase the effect of an unsupported claim about a group. The animal groups in the film are not a scientific model of human race. The crew's caption is far smaller, but it made the same kind of move. Your job is to check the log's times before the correction goes up.

Sources

An Exploration of the Structure of Effective Apologies

How to unring the bell: A meta-analytic approach to correction of misinformation

RTDNA Code of Ethics

That was wrong

Zootopia: the press conference

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has rounded corners and a thin black border around the edges.

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document. For each one, write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Recap caption, posted Saturday 11:08 a.m.

The caption

Great night, once the younger crowd finally got organized.

Look closely: Which group does this caption ask readers to blame, and on what evidence?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | Setup log, Friday evening

Jordy’s event log

5:40 p.m. Projector failure reported. 6:00 p.m. Attendees seated. 6:20 p.m. Replacement projector connected. Note: Anika and Dec helped carry chairs before doors opened.

Look closely: What happened at 5:40 that the caption never mentions?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | Voice note to the crew

Anika’s message

“We were helping you set up. Why are we the problem in this post?”

Look closely: What fact does Anika add, and what is she asking the crew?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence D | Draft correction, Saturday 2:15 p.m., not posted

Gia’s first correction

Sorry if this came across wrong. We love our younger neighbors and would never want anyone to feel excluded.

Look closely: What fact does this correct? Who does the word “if” put the problem on?

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Key idea: corrections

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics. Then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

Gia’s caption did two jobs at once. It explained the late start, and it blamed a group of people for it. A **claim** is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence. Jordy’s setup log checks the caption’s claim and shows a projector failure instead.

A **correction** is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information. It should appear where people saw the mistake, so the crew should edit the recap caption itself. A 2016 study of apologies found that taking responsibility and offering to repair the harm mattered most. Gia’s first draft talks about loving younger neighbors, and it does neither.

Accountability is owning a mistake and doing what you said you would do to fix it. That means naming who corrects the caption, who contacts the people it blamed and who checks the next recap. Anika does not have to comfort Gia or approve the correction in public. The crew can offer her a private way to respond.

Professional standards

Real source | Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

PRSA Code of Ethics: Free Flow of Information

“Act promptly to correct erroneous communications for which the practitioner is responsible.”

In plain words: Public relations professionals who belong to PRSA agree to fix their own mistakes quickly.

Question: The recap caption went up Saturday at 11:08 a.m. What should the crew change first, and where?

Your answer

The first change is ____, made in ____, because ____.

How a real newsroom corrects mistakes: name the error, fix it on the story and keep a public list.



A real brand apology after an ad played into a racial stereotype; compare the words with what changed afterward.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Sort the evidence

On your own Compare the four accounts. Mark where they agree, where they differ and which one was written at the time. About 8 minutes.

Place the four accounts side by side. Where do they agree, where do they split, and which one was written down at the time?

Account 1
Caption: the night went well once the younger crowd got organized.

Account 2
Event log: projector failed at 5:40; replacement connected at 6:20; Anika and Dec carried chairs.

Account 3
Anika: “We were helping you set up.”

Where they agree

Where they differ

Check: Which account was recorded at the time rather than remembered afterward?

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what goes first in the correction and explain why. Then fix the two marked lines.
About 6 minutes.

What should go first in the correction?

☐ **A** An explanation of how bad Gia feels about the caption.

☐ **B** The wrong claim, and what the event log shows.

☐ **C** Delete the post and stay quiet.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

We want to apologize for our last post. We didn't mean to offend anyone and we love having younger people at our events. It was a really stressful night and **1** things were hectic so we said something we shouldn't have. Honestly we were all tired and trying to get everything set up on time, and it's been a lot. We are sorry if anyone was hurt. **2** We promise it won't happen again and we hope everyone keeps coming! Thank you all for your support and understanding, it means a lot to us.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

Grades 11–12

Your task

On your own Read the steps. Fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Build a full crisis communications plan for the recap error: goals, audiences, key message, channels, holding statement, correction and measurement.

Use: Case evidence plus PRSA Code of Ethics and SPJ Code of Ethics excerpts on correcting errors.

You'll make: Communications plan, one page (about 400 words)

Time: 60 minutes

- 1 Reread Evidence A, B, C and D. List every audience that saw the caption or was named in it.
- 2 Match each audience to a channel that reaches it.
- 3 Write one key message that is accurate for every audience.
- 4 Plan a holding statement and a correction.
- 5 Write a measure that checks understanding, not views.
- 6 Cite one code to resolve a tension between reputation and harm.
- 7 Draft the plan, about 400 words, on the Your draft page.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Audiences and channels

Key message

Measurement

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

On your own Write your draft in the boxes. Use your planner from the page before. About 22 minutes.

[illegible]

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions and mark your level in each rubric row. Then write one change you made. About 6 minutes.

Does every audience have a matching channel?

☐ Yes☐ No

Is your key message accurate and the same everywhere?

☐ Yes☐ No

Does your measure check understanding, not views?

☐ Yes☐ No

Do you cite a code to resolve one tension?

☐ Yes☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No evidence about the delay.	☐ Mentions “technical issues” vaguely.	☐ Cites the projector failure from the log.	☐ Cites specific times and corrects who actually helped.
Reasoning	☐ Apologizes for feelings only.	☐ Admits error but not what it was.	☐ Names the inaccurate claim and replaces it.	☐ Explains why the claim harmed a group and how the repair prevents a repeat.
Audience & purpose	☐ Does not consider who saw the post.	☐ Speaks to readers in general.	☐ Reaches the people who were blamed.	☐ Reaches the original audience and the blamed group through appropriate channels.

How your work is scored, continued

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Softens tone only.	☐ Adds facts and a repair.	☐ Adds facts, an owner, a check and removes shifting of blame.

One change I made after feedback

I changed ___ because ____.

Notes

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question. Then finish My take. About 10 minutes.

- 1** The caption felt true to Gia because a few people came in late. Why was that not enough evidence?

- 2** What evidence would show that the repair happened?

- 3** After the correction goes up, what is still up to Anika and Dec to decide?

My take

My claim: ____.

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

The limit of the evidence is ____.

Notes

Talk about this case at home

Case 3: What should a group do after a public mistake?

In this case, a group of friends posts a caption that wrongly blames younger neighbors for a late start. Your student compared the caption with an event log and wrote a correction and a plan to repair the harm.

Questions to talk about

- 1 What makes an apology feel complete?
- 2 Where should a correction appear so the people who saw a mistake will see it?
- 3 How can a group check a claim before it posts about an event?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.