

22 DO'S

FOR COVERING CONCUSSIONS

With the help of some of the biggest names in sports media, we've developed 22 lessons to help broadcasters and journalists cover concussions the right way.

A → BEFORE THE EVENT		
LESSON:	DON'T:	DO:
1 Concussion Protocols	Cover an event without a thorough understanding of the governing concussion protocols.	→ Use our concussion protocol warehouse in the CLF Media Toolkit to find that league's concussion protocol.
2 Concussion Definition	Refer to a concussion as a brain bruise or a contusion.	→ Refer to a concussion as a type of traumatic brain injury that changes the way the brain functions. Some concussions can cause permanent damage to brain cells.
3 Concussion Basics	Cover an event without knowing concussion basics like signs and symptoms.	→ Use the CLF Media Toolkit to become comfortable with signs and symptoms, as well as terms like posturing.
4 What Can Go Wrong	Ignore the potential consequences of playing with a concussion.	→ Report that if an athlete is not immediately removed from play following a concussion, they are at an increased risk for prolonged concussion symptoms, Post-Concussion Syndrome (PCS), and Second-Impact Syndrome (SIS).



“YOU CAN'T COVER SPORTS WITHOUT COVERING CONCUSSIONS. Part of preparing any sports journalism student for a professional career must include a concussion education component.”

– J.A. Adande
 Director of Sports Journalism
 Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism

Take **P.R.I.D.E.** in your reporting

P

Know your **PROTOCOLS**

R

REPORT what you see

I

Provide **INSIGHT**

D

Focus on the **DIAGNOSIS**

E

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B → AT THE MOMENT OF IMPACT		
LESSON:	DON'T:	DO:
5 Report All Possible Concussions	Observe a possible concussion mechanism (like a head impact) followed by a concussion sign without reporting that it is a possible concussion.	→ Report that any head impact or rapid head movement, plus a visible concussion sign, should trigger the league's concussion protocol.
6 Don't Say "Head Injury"	Refer to a concussion as a "head injury."	→ Refer to a concussion as a concussion, brain injury, or traumatic brain injury.
7 Signs vs. Symptoms	Confuse concussion signs and concussion symptoms.	→ Know that signs are the observable effects of a concussion, while symptoms are what an athlete feels (double vision, headache, etc.)
8 Retire Ding And Bell Ringer	Use colloquial terms and phrases such as "ding," "bell ringer," or "shaking off the cobwebs" to describe a concussion.	→ Use concussion, brain injury, or traumatic brain injury.
9 Concussions Are Diagnosed by Doctors	Say "that's a concussion" when a player appears to have a concussion.	→ Say "That could be a sign of a concussion" or "That looks like a concussion, but we'll wait for the doctor's diagnosis."
10 Whiplash Can Cause Concussion	Assume there was no concussion if there was not a direct blow to the head.	→ Know a concussion is caused by a force to the brain, which can come from whiplash-type movements and impacts to the body.
11 Concussion Signs Are Not Funny	Laugh if a player goes to the wrong huddle or sideline after an impact.	→ Consider they may have a concussion. Explain how their behavior may be a sign of concussion.

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C → IN-GAME CONCUSSION EVALUATION		
LESSON:	DON'T:	DO:
12 Report Protocol Failures	Be silent when you see a breach of concussion protocol.	→ Acknowledge how the protocol was breached.
13 Clock Concussion Evaluations	Assume every concussion evaluation is appropriately thorough.	→ Monitor how long each concussion evaluation takes, and report based on your knowledge that a thorough concussion evaluation should take at least ten minutes to complete.
14 Concussion Evaluation Setting Matters	Fail to pay attention to where an evaluation took place.	→ Note when a player should be taken to the locker room for evaluation according to league protocol (relevant to NFL, NHL, and others). Report if the protocol was breached.
15 Passing A Sideline Exam Does Not Rule Out Concussion	Assume that passing one concussion evaluation completely rules out a concussion.	→ Report the results of the evaluation, but be aware an athlete cleared to return may still have a concussion.
16 Playing Through A Concussion Does Not Make You a Hero	Glorify an athlete playing through a concussion and refer to them as heroic.	→ Discuss how they should not be in the game for their own safety.



“IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO MY AUDIENCE to know the sport I am covering inside and out. Concussions are now part of the knowledge base that we have to master.”

– Andrea Kremer
Analyst, Amazon TNF / NFL Network / HBO Real Sports
Lecturer, Boston University College of Communication

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D → AFTER A CONCUSSION IS SUSPECTED OR DIAGNOSED

LESSON:		DON'T:	DO:
17	Concussion Symptoms Can Be Delayed	Assume all concussions are diagnosed at the time of injury.	→ Report the results of the evaluation but be aware that an athlete may still have a concussion with delayed symptoms.
18	Predicting Return To Play	Speculate, or allow a coach or teammate to speculate, on when an athlete will return to play.	→ Mention that every concussion is different, and that symptoms at the time of injury do not correlate well with recovery. The athlete will be cleared when they have completed the concussion protocol.
19	A Mild Concussion?	Put any qualifiers on a concussion such as “mild,” “moderate,” or “severe,” especially before the athlete has recovered.	→ Only use “mild” or “severe” retrospectively.
20	Speculating On Retirement	Suggest that an athlete should retire because of their number of diagnosed concussions.	→ Report that there is no magic number of concussions and that a recommendation to retire is based on many variables.
21	Concussion History	Treat an athlete’s publicly known number of concussions as their total number of concussions.	→ Use the qualifier of “5th <i>diagnosed</i> concussion.”
22	“Head Injury” vs. “Concussion”	Allow a “head injury” diagnosis to go unquestioned after an athlete shows concussion signs.	→ If the player is suspected to have a concussion and is diagnosed with a “head injury” (scalp, face, etc.), confirm whether or not they have been diagnosed with a concussion.

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