

Ethics in computing article discussion questions

General DQs

1. What are *ethics*? What is a *code of ethics*?
2. Were there any parts of this reading that you disagreed with? What parts and why?
3. **Is it inherently your responsibility to be a whistleblower?**

Specific DQs

1. Under “What is a Profession?”, the paper contends that jobs like medicine, law, engineering, counseling, and accounting are traditionally considered professions, while plumbers, fashion models, and sales clerks are not. Why is this? In what ways is computing like a “profession”, in what ways is it not?
2. **If there were to be a licensing or accreditation system, what should it license individuals to do? What should the requirements/examination be?**
3. Rank the responsibilities in the “What is Moral Responsibility in Computing?” section in order of importance. Is it necessarily consistent across all problems?
4. Under “Responsibilities to Employers”, the paper defines a conflict of interest to be “*when a professional is asked to render a judgment, but the professional has personal or financial interests that may interfere with the exercise of that judgment.*” Is there ever a scenario in which the professional should prioritize such personal interests over the objective at hand?
5. Explain why you agree or disagree with the “three ways in which the morality of an action can be evaluated” under “Ethical Decision Making for Computing Professionals”. What else would you include?
6. Discuss your opinion of the ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

Ethics: a case study

Discussion agreements

1. This discussion takes place in a classroom setting. This classroom is a *safe space*. Any opinion or feeling expressed within the confines of these walls *stays within these walls*.
2. This discussion is not a free-for-all; each and every participant has social responsibility to their peers and themselves.
3. Participants are not here to “win”. There is no right and there is no wrong. Participants are expected to be willing to revise their thinking over time. In particular, two rules hold:
 - a. **Listen to understand**; if you are trying to poke holes in what somebody is saying, you are listening the wrong way.
 - b. **Speak to be understood**; if you are trying to persuade, you are speaking the wrong way.
4. Do not prefix any sentence with the word “obviously” or variants thereof. If you need to say it, it is not obvious. If it is not obvious, you should not use the word.
5. Speak for yourself, not for entire groups.
6. Understand that there is a difference between *intent* and *impact*. The things you say may be interpreted in wildly different ways than you intended. Speak not without thinking first. React not without thinking first.

The case study method

The idea is to get out on the table, so to speak, the “who, what, when, where, and how” **without the “why.”** This tactic is designed to ensure that the subsequent analysis is anchored in the case itself, that it is indeed “grounded upon some stubborn facts.”

Once this process is completed, then comes the time for analysis. However, not surprisingly, the kind of analysis is proscribed quite specifically, according to a plan that has been dubbed “the approach.”

1. **Scenario Facts:** Identify objective truths detailed in the piece that are relevant to analysis.
 - a. “It took about 38 minutes to send a second alert that said the original one was an error.” 
 - b. “The person who pressed the button was considered a source of concern for 10

years by their employer.” ✓

- c. “The person who pressed the button was responsible for the false alert.” ✗
- 2. Relevant Context:** Include outside information not mentioned in the piece but would be helpful to recognize for better analysis.
- a. “North Korea announced ten days earlier that it would not hesitate in taking ‘drastic measures.’” ✓
- 3. Inference:** Analyze the situation by drawing sensible conclusions from information presented, stating any assumptions you made (if any).
- a. “Not cancelling the alert when directed to by his supervisor was a violation of moral responsibility to both his employer and the public.” ✓

AIR model of ethical inquiry ([link](#))

1. Awareness
 - a. Recognize a situation as an ethical dilemma instead of ignoring it
 - b. Jump on that uneasiness you feel
 - c. View these situations not as dangers and *problems* but as opportunities for growth
2. Investigation
 - a. STOP your knee-jerk reaction
 - b. Who is impacted by this dilemma?
 - c. Who are the stakeholders in this situation?
 - d. What do you see as the specific underlying ethical issues?
 - e. What assumptions/beliefs were underlying your reaction to, and feeling about the situation?
 - f. How will you investigate these assumptions and beliefs?
 - g. What are *all* the options you have in this situation? **All** of them. Why are each of them good? Not so good?
3. Response
 - a. Self-care? Share your thinking about the situation? Remove yourself from the situation? Advocate for a cause? Something else entirely?