

Role Cards

Note: These roles are fictional, although the challenges and decisions reflect real events. As you go through the exercise, remember to react as you believe your character would, and do not confuse the roles with real people.

Role Card



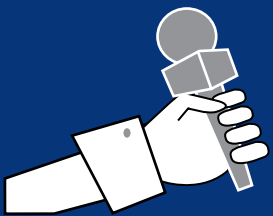
Amy Accurate (reporter for the local newspaper, *The Roanoke Times*)

Your job: To report the story as fully, fairly and accurately as you can, as fast as you can.

What makes your job difficult:

- It's hard to get solid information about what's going on.
 - Local authorities — police, government officials, etc. — don't want to reveal too much. Their first task is to investigate the crime, not to give out information. Police officers also want to maintain order.
- University officials are in shock, and it takes time for them to respond. Their focus is on coping with the tragedy and protecting students, staff and the university's image.
- The sheer number of news media — including high-profile journalists — arriving makes it hard to find people willing to be interviewed or even to get around. Your usual contacts at the university, the hospitals and police departments are overwhelmed.

Role Card



Oscar Onaire (president of NBC News)

Your job: To see that your staff reports the story as fully, fairly and accurately as you can; to provide, for the rest of the world, background information about the event; and to frame the story in the context of larger, national issues (violence in America, mental health, gun control).

What makes your job difficult:

- You don't have reporters in town, so you don't know who's knowledgeable in the community and are hampered in access to sources of information.
- To cover this important story, you must import expensive equipment and many staffers. Plus, you feel pressure to get a new angle on the story, to scoop the competition.

Role Card



John Academic (university president)

Your job: To protect students and staff and the university; to ensure your school is presented in an accurate — and positive — light; to help the university community cope with this tragedy and to project an image of control and good judgment — so parents and community members won't worry that this event could happen again.

What makes your job difficult:

- Students, staff and parents are devastated by the shootings; they mourn the loss of peers and colleagues. Their world — and yours — has been shaken.
- You never have had to deal with media on such an enormous scale. Reporters are demanding answers while you are trying to react to new information.
- Criticism of the university's initial reaction surfaces and you feel under fire.
- Along with the influx of media, parents are clamoring for their children to come home. You have to respond to injured staff and students and reach out the families of those killed or injured.

Role Card



Jackson Studios (student and staff writer at the student-run news web site planetblacksburg.com)

Your task: To get as much information, as quickly as possible, out to the university community about the shootings and the victims.

What makes your task difficult:

- You are mourning for lost friends and the change that you know this will bring to your school.
- Although you have an advantage in that you know the area, you are competing with an influx of national and local news media and the sheer numbers make it hard to get access and information.
- When you start on the story, you are locked down in a classroom with only cell phones and Internet access.
- National news media see a story angle in the way student journalists cover the events and you and others on staff are inundated with requests for interviews.

Role Card



Darryl Detective (university police chief)

Your job: To investigate the shootings as quickly and as effectively as possible; to determine whether others were involved; to project an image of authority and good judgment to the citizens of the community and the world so as not to cause further alarm.

What makes your job difficult:

- The press and the public are clamoring for information, but you worry about revealing too much and thus compromising the investigation.
- On the other hand, you know information must be released — to help allay people's fears and to develop sources of additional information you might be able to use in your investigation.
- Although you routinely work with the media in criminal cases, you never before have had to deal with an onslaught of media attention of this magnitude. Your staff is overwhelmed.
- You are part of the university community and must set aside your emotions while you deal with the press, the public, other law enforcement officials and the investigation.

Role Card



Jane Q. Public (a reader and viewer from another city in the state)

Your task: As a news consumer, you want to learn as much as you can about the tragic shootings — to see if you can make sense of this event and to see if this could happen in your own community.

What makes your task difficult:

- You are hungry for new information; this is a senseless tragedy and you can't seem to get enough details about what has happened.
- You don't understand how such an event could happen; you worry that it reflects a growing problem with violence in the country. You worry that someone you know might have been killed or injured.
- Information seems to change constantly and you're not sure what's accurate. There are so many possible sources of information — TV, radio, newspapers, Web sites — it's not clear what's credible.
- You know the university is a source of pride in your state. You know people who have sent their children there. You are concerned about what this means for the school's reputation and how it makes your state look.