

AMA Manual of Style

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Public and Private Figures

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A public figure is a person who assumes a role of prominence in society, such as an elected official, a celebrity, or an infamous criminal. In cases of alleged libel, public figures are afforded less legal protection than private individuals. In a 1964 case, *New York Times Co v Sullivan*, the US Supreme Court determined that for a public official to prove defamation, the official must demonstrate that the alleged defamatory statement was made with “actual malice” (ie, with knowledge that the statement was false or with disregard for the truth of the statement) (see also , *Defamation, Libel*). A