

Introduction to Professional Ethics

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Key concepts, purposes, and practical guidelines for ethical conduct in the workplace.

1. What Is Professional Ethics?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A set of principles and standards that guide behavior and decision-making within a specific profession.
Scope	Covers relationships with clients, colleagues, employers, the public, and the broader society.
Goal	Protect the integrity of the profession, ensure public trust, and promote fairness and responsibility.
Difference from Personal Ethics	Personal ethics are individual moral beliefs; professional ethics are codified rules that apply uniformly to all members of a profession.

2. Why Professional Ethics Matter

1. **Public Trust** – Guarantees that professionals act in the best interest of those they serve.
2. **Legal Protection** – Helps prevent malpractice, fraud, and other violations that could lead to lawsuits or regulatory sanctions.
3. **Professional Reputation** – Upholds the credibility of both individuals and the profession as a whole.
4. **Workplace Harmony** – Provides a common framework for resolving conflicts and making fair decisions.
5. **Social Responsibility** – Aligns professional activities with broader societal values such as sustainability, equity, and human rights.

3. Core Ethical Principles (Common Across Most Professions)

Principle	Typical Application
1. Principle of Conservation of Mass	1. Chemical Reactions: Balancing chemical equations to ensure mass is conserved.
2. Principle of Conservation of Energy	2. Thermodynamics: Calculating heat transfer and work done in engines and refrigerators.
3. Principle of Conservation of Momentum	3. Mechanics: Analyzing collisions and the motion of objects.
4. Principle of Conservation of Charge	4. Electromagnetism: Understanding the flow of electric current and the behavior of charged particles.
5. Principle of Conservation of Angular Momentum	5. Astronomy: Explaining the rotation of celestial bodies and the formation of galaxies.

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Beneficence	Act to promote the well-being of clients/customers and avoid harm.
Non-maleficence	Do not cause unnecessary injury or damage.
Autonomy	Respect the right of individuals to make informed choices.
Justice	Treat all parties fairly; distribute benefits and burdens equitably.
Confidentiality	Protect sensitive information unless legally required to disclose.
Integrity	Be honest, transparent, and consistent in all professional actions.
Accountability	Accept responsibility for decisions and their outcomes.
Professional Competence	Maintain and update knowledge and skills relevant to the field.

4. Typical Sources of Professional Ethical Guidance

Source	Example
Codes of Conduct	American Medical Association (AMA) Code of Medical Ethics, IEEE Code of Ethics.
Licensing Boards & Regulatory Agencies	State bar associations, nursing boards, financial regulatory bodies.
Professional Associations	American Bar Association, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Society for Human Resource Management.
Organizational Policies	Company handbooks, internal compliance manuals.
Legal Statutes	Data protection laws (e.g., GDPR), anti-discrimination statutes.
Industry Standards	ISO 27001 for information security, ASTM standards for engineering.

5. Common Ethical Dilemmas & How to Approach Them

Dilemma	Questions to Ask	Decision-Making Steps
Conflict of Interest	Do I have a personal stake that could bias my judgment?	1. Identify the conflict. 2. Disclose it to relevant parties. 3. Recuse or mitigate as appropriate.
Confidentiality vs. Public Safety	Is there a legal or ethical duty to disclose?	1. Verify legal obligations. 2. Assess risk to individuals/public. 3. Seek guidance from ethics committee or legal counsel.

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Dilemma

Questions to Ask

Decision? Making Steps

**Pressure to Cut
Corners**

Will the shortcut
compromise quality,
safety, or regulations?

1. Evaluate consequences. 2. Document
concerns.