Ethics in Technical Writing
What are ethics?

- Principles of conduct that apply to a group or an individual.
- Can be personal, professional, or legal.
- Can conflict.
Relevant areas of law:

- Copyright law
- Trademark law
- Contract law
- Liability law
Characteristics of an ethical code

- Protects public, not members of organization or profession
- Specific and comprehensive
- Enforceable
Whistle-blowing

✓ What should you do if you encounter activity that’s illegal or unethical?

✓ What if the conduct is profitable?
Principles for ethical communication

✓ Abide by relevant laws:
  ✓ Don’t plagiarize
  ✓ Honor trademark and copyright
  ✓ Honor contracts
  ✓ Abide by liability laws

✓ Abide by appropriate corporate or professional code of conduct
Principles for ethical communication

- Tell the truth
  - Don’t lie by omission

- Don’t mislead your readers
  - False implication:
    - The Swedish Bikini Team
  - Exaggeration:
    - You could tow a mountain with this truck!
  - Euphemism
Principles for ethical communication

✓ Avoid discriminatory language
  ✓ Who will read this?
  ✓ Consider cultural issues that may arise when your work is read by others (what if the company is bought by a Japanese competitor?)

✓ Acknowledge assistance from others
  ✓ Use full, standard citations.
  ✓ Credit drawings, photographs, and charts accordingly.
  ✓ Cite any research sources including Web sites.
    ✓ What about Wikipedia?