

Fact-Checker Guidelines: Hybrid Model

All stories submitted to *[[insert publication name]]* go through a fact-check, but the exact process depends on the type of story.

Short or timely pieces are typically fact-checked using the newspaper model. Longform, investigative, or legally sensitive stories are typically checked using the magazine model. The details for both are below. If you aren't sure how you should fact-check your assigned stories, contact your editor.

Fact-checking is vital: It helps us keep reader trust, and it may also help prevent sources from suing over inaccurate claims.

Newspaper Model

It is the journalist's responsibility to double-check the bulk of their work. You will do a light fact-check based on the following.

What We Fact-Check:

- Spelling of names and places
- Dates
- Ages
- Titles and affiliations
- Genders and pronouns
- And any other basic information checkable with published sources

What We Don't Fact-Check:

- Original quotes
- Any other information from an interview

What We Expect from You:

- Check basic facts in the story against the original source materials.
- Consider the truthfulness of the story's overarching themes, narrative arcs, or thesis arguments.
- Look for potential errors of omission (ex: key information that contradicts or complicates a story's angle or thesis).
- In cases where primary sources are impossible to find — and this should be rare — use at least three unrelated and reliable secondary sources per fact and alert your editor.

- Be aware of controversial or critical topics and pay special attention to word choice and fairness.
- If a writer leaves a TK in a story (i.e. a placeholder), feel free to follow up for more information and sourcing.
- Books are rarely fact-checked, so corroborate information and make sure the story includes appropriate caveats.
- Don't just mark a fact as wrong; provide an accurate replacement that fits in roughly the same amount of space. Provide context and sourcing on the change.
- If you see evidence of plagiarism or other misconduct by the journalist, alert your editor immediately.
- Be diplomatic with your colleagues.

Magazine Model

While the journalist and editor also are responsible for the facts in the story, it is your job to conduct a thorough fact-check.

What We Fact-Check:

- Spelling of names and places
- Dates
- Ages
- Titles and affiliations
- Genders and pronouns
- Quotes and paraphrases
- Physical descriptions of people, places, and things
- Eyewitness accounts
- Numbers, statistics, and calculations
- Measurements
- Geography
- Scientific or technical explanations
- Analogies and metaphors
- Product descriptions
- Quotes from movies, history, etc.
- Superlatives: First, biggest, etc.
- Anecdotes widely assumed to be true
- Illustrations and photos, including captions

- Word choices
- Factual assertions
- Individual facts and overarching truths
- Any other matter of fact that isn't included on this list

What We Expect from You

Either your editor or the journalist will send you an annotated story and back-up materials. For each story, please:

- Check *every* fact in the story against the original source materials.
- Consider the truthfulness of the story's overarching themes, narrative arcs, or thesis arguments.
- Look for potential errors of omission (ex: key information from human or written sources that contradict or complicate a story's angle or thesis).
- Use primary sources for all facts, and especially for criminal charges or other misconduct, or claims that could otherwise harm a source or reader if inaccurate.
- In cases where primary sources are impossible to find — and this should be rare — use at least three unrelated and reliable secondary sources per fact and alert your editor.
- Assess the quality of the back-up material and conduct additional original reporting as needed.
- Do not share verbatim quotations, unpublished stories, or portions of stories with sources. Even if they ask nicely.
- When possible, interview sources by phone rather than email.
- Avoid yes/no questions and seek context.
- Be aware of controversial or critical topics and pay special attention to word choices and fairness.
- If a writer leaves a TK in a story (i.e. a placeholder), feel free to follow up for more information and sourcing.
- If a source provides a superior quote, metaphor, or anecdote during your interview, alert your editor in case they want to swap it into the final story.

- Books are rarely fact-checked, so corroborate information and make sure the story includes appropriate caveats.
- Be diplomatic with both sources and colleagues.
- Do not promise sources that you will make a change. Instead, let them know you will relay their feedback to your editor.
- Don't just mark a fact as wrong; provide an accurate replacement that fits in roughly the same amount of space. In comments or footnotes, provide context and sourcing on the change.
- If you see evidence of plagiarism or other misconduct by the journalist, or if a source is refusing to participate in the fact-check, alert your editor immediately.
- At the end of your fact-check, provide a concise report on suggested changes to your editor and remain available for follow-up questions. (This may simply be a copy of the annotated story, with your additional comments or footnotes.)