

Fact-Checker Guidelines: Magazine Model

All stories submitted to *[[insert publication name]]* are fact-checked. The fact-check typically happens after the journalist and their assigning editor submit a draft that is as close to final as possible.

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

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- Do not share verbatim quotations, unpublished stories, or portions of stories with sources.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 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.
- 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 from books 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.)