



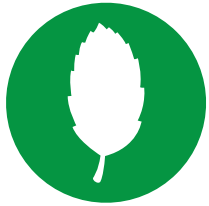
IMMJ

Copy Edit & Fact Check

What you **NEED** to do with each story...



Self Edit



Copy Edit - best with a trusted peer



Fact Check (with a peer - takes around 1 -3 hours)





Reporting & Sources

It doesn't matter how pretty your visuals are or how good your mm story is. If the underlying reporting and journalism of your assignment is flawed you will not do well! Your work needs to be accurate, fair and balanced.

You need objectivity so swap with another group to catch any major problems (while you still have time to fix them). Maybe you need to go back to a source for verification or to ask a follow up question. Maybe your sources aren't credible enough and you need another?

If you catch any potential problems let me know so I can help you.



Copy Edit & Fact Check

Ideally you'd complete a copy edit and then fact check, however this week now not all students will have self copy edited. So, rather than waste your partners time too much on copy editing, focus on **fact checking**. You can return to copy editing once you are done with the fact check.

Self Editing

What is it?

Self Editing - Before you send work to a copy editor you should already have self-edited for grammar, spelling, content, flow, and readability. You should also have already fact checked your work. The copy edit is to catch mistakes and weaknesses and improve readability.

- 1) Follow the diamond structure if relevant. (As much as possible).
- 2) Make sure you are writing in a consistent tense (Usually past tense).
- 3) Take time to revise headlines and subheadings (This can take a lot of time and thought!!!).
- 4) Read each and every sentence aloud a couple of times, does it make sense? If not revise until it does. (This should take at least a two hours).
- 5) Put your work through grammarly for a final spell and grammar check.
- 6) Underline and check facts. Are they accurate, and are they attributed properly.



Copy Editing

What is it?

Copy editing is a process that ensures that text is correct in terms of:

- Spelling, grammar and punctuation
- Jargon
- Terminology (choice of words)
- Design and formatting on the webpage(s)
- Structure and flow
- Copy editing also ensures that the points the writer wants to communicate are clear and easy to understand.
- Making sure any factual data in the text is accurate we'll focus on this in the fact checking section.

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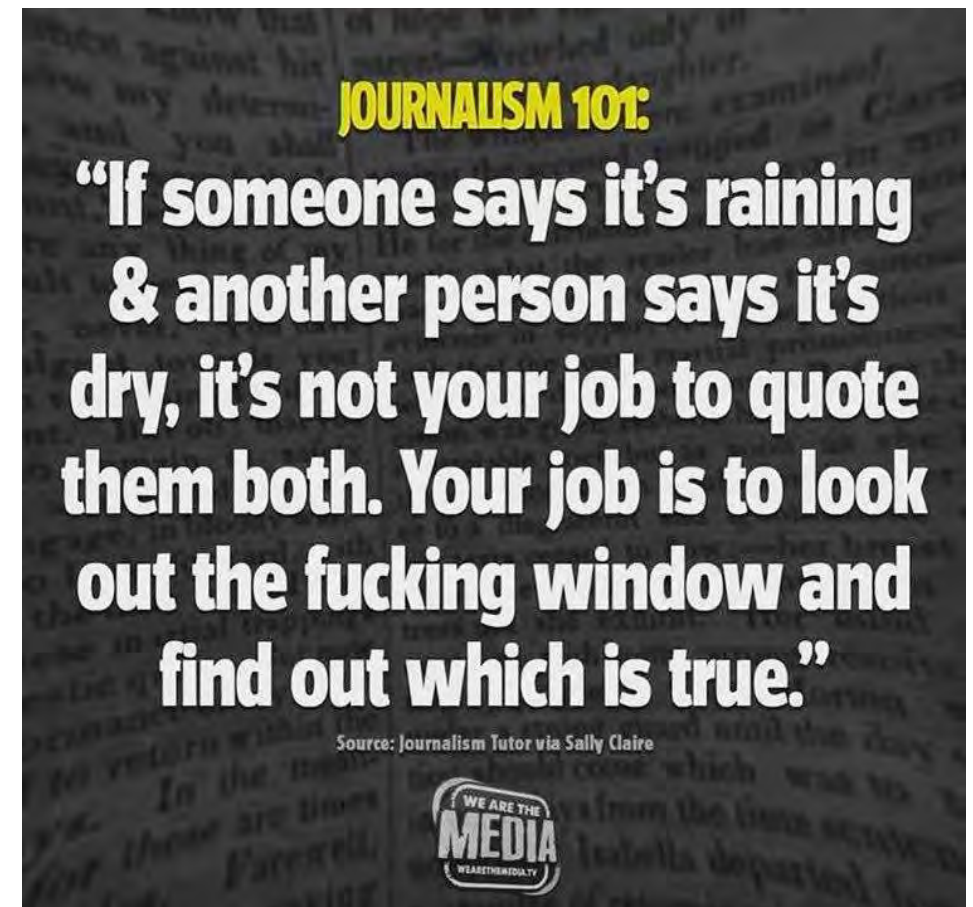
A copy editor's work is largely invisible, until she misses something, in which case she takes the blame. But most important is that a copy editor stands in for the reader, gingerly reshaping, clarifying and correcting things before the reader can see them and post an excoriating comment.

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— *Merrill Perlman, former NYT editor*

General Tips

- Paragraphs in news stories should generally be no more than one to four sentences each.
- Sentences should be kept relatively short, when possible use the subject-verb-object formula. Backward constructions are harder to read
- Don't use complicated-sounding words when simpler ones will do. A laceration is a cut; a contusion is a bruise; an abrasion is a scrape. A news story should be understandable to everyone.
- Don't use the first-person "I" in news stories.
- News stories are generally written in the past tense.
- Avoid too many adjectives. There's no need to write "the white-hot blaze" or "the brutal murder." We know fire is hot and killing someone is brutal.
- Don't use phrases such as "thankfully, everyone escaped the fire unhurt." Obviously, it's good that people weren't hurt. Your readers can figure that out themselves.
- Avoid injecting your own morals, values or opinions into a news story. Save those for an editorial. You can and often should however make fact based conclusions.
- When you first refer to someone, use the full name and job title if applicable. On all subsequent references, use the last name. E.g. "Jane Jones" when you first mention her in your story, but after that, it would be "Jones." An exception is if two people with the same last name are in your story, in which case use their full names. Reporters generally don't typically use "Mr." or "Mrs." in AP style.
- Don't repeat information.
- Don't summarise the story at the end by repeating what's already been



said. Try to find information for the conclusion that advances the story.

Fact Checking

What is it?

Fact checking as a concept and job title took hold in journalism in New York in the 1920s. TIME magazine was at the time a young publication, and its two founders decided they needed a group of staffers to ensure everything gathered by the reporters was accurate.

TIME co-founder Edward Kennedy explained that the job of the fact checker was to identify and then confirm or refute every verifiable fact in a magazine article:

“The most important point to remember in checking is that the writer is your natural enemy. He is trying to see how much he can get away with. Remember that when people write letters about mistakes, it is you who will be screeched at. So protect yourself”.

Fact checkers are invisible until something goes wrong! Be responsible in this exercise. Your partners grade depends on this!



Fact Checking - What Do I Check?

- **Proper names and place names, ages.** (Is the Chinese spelling correct and correctly formatted? - double check the name online if possible, grill your partner).
- **References to dates, time, distance**
- **Quotations (and facts within quotes)** Make sure they are properly quoted. Are they full or partial quotes? Are the quotes formatted correctly?
- Sometimes quoted information isn't 'factual' it's simply the opinion or perspective of an authority in this case it cannot be 'fact checked' instead check whether the source is credible and relevant. Is the source speaking to a subject where there are alternative credible perspectives? If so are those perspectives given for balance?
- **Facts**
- **Historical facts**
- **Numbers and statistics (mixing up “billions” & “millions” or just getting stuff wrong!)** People citing numbers in interviews are operating on memory, unless the report is right in front of them. And memory is unreliable, asking the source of numbers both helps you verify that number and often gives you access to a report with more numbers (sometimes more relevant than the ones the source was citing) and other helpful facts.
- **Any argument or assertions that depend on fact**
- **Check attribution** Have you attributed (and linked) appropriately and correctly the facts you don't know firsthand? This both ensures accuracy and prevents accidental plagiarism.

Fact Checking - What Do I Check?

- **Fairness** – Have all sides stakeholders been contacted and given a chance to talk? Is this an issue with some varying established discourses and perspectives? Have different sides been given? Are they presented proportionately?
- **Missing** – Does the story leave any important questions unanswered?
- **Context** – Does the reader have the context to understand the story?
- **Assumptions** - Check the story for assumptions. When you find them, challenge them and verify, remove or amend.
- **Read the actual passage to an expert.** If you are writing about something you don't understand well (a legal, medical or technical process, for instance), read the final copy to someone who does understand. (see next page)
- You DO NOT need to fact check or attribute facts that are common knowledge or undisputed facts, (China's population) or when the information is on the record and readily available (Xi Jinping announced a new policy)
- As a general rule, events or activities that a writer witnesses do not require attribution.

Fact Checking

Common Sources of Error

- working from memory
- making assumptions
- second-hand sources



Fact Checking

Always ask yourself these questions when trying to verify information:

- "Who says?"
- "How do they know?"
- "Are they biased?"
- "Are they **credible**?"
- Are they in a position to know?
- "What don't I know?"



How do you know that?

For the quotes from human sources the author should have asked “How do you know that?” Check whether they did.

This is the most important question a reporter can ask. When people tell you things, you often don’t know whether they are sharing facts they know firsthand, things they think they remember, rumours they heard or opinions they hold or heard. “How do you know that?” helps you learn and judge the accuracy of the things people tell you.

A common source of reporter error is repeating misinformation from sources. Judith Miller’s infamous errors about weapons of mass destruction came from trusting sources who were lying or misinformed. She said, “If your sources are wrong, you are wrong.” I say, when you ask, “How do you know that?” you reach more firsthand sources and you sniff out the innocent and dishonest errors of your sources. Remember, your name goes at the top of the story, not your sources’.

“How do you know that?” is also a great question for editors to ask reporters. I also like a second question my friend and sometime-training colleague Rosalie Stemer encourages reporters and editors to ask: “How else do you know that?” In other words can what you think to be true be verified with another credible source?

In this exercise your partner will act as an editor - are there any spots where the author needs to check back with a source? Or can the information be verified independently? Go verify!



Exercise

- Self edit - 30 mins - Assign a team member
- One person from another group acts as fact checker, view the story once without making notes, this is just to get a sense of the full text and how it appears on the page.
- Now read again and fact check - underline all the facts - try to verify anything that you can by yourself. Leave the ones that you need to question your partner with. Work silently on your own, this should probably take at least an hour, maybe 2.
- Once complete grill your partner and wrap up the fact checking.
- For every fact is there a properly formatted hyperlink to the original source?
- Have quotes been attributed with correct format?



Useful End / Extra Notes

Fact Checking

Where do I fact check?

- Go to the primary source when possible. Using secondary sources like articles can perpetuate errors.
- Use your university library's, your news organization's, or your public library's electronic and print resources.
- Search databases of news and journal articles, like LexisNexis or ScienceDirect, which aren't accessible on the web, but are available in libraries.
- Contact an expert - but check them out
- Google Scholar
- Google Books
- Open data portals
- Reference books
- Find a stakeholder - someone who's interested in the same thing you are



Evaluating Credibility (Documents)

- **Look for sites / publications / news outlets / research from established institutions** The internet is full of publications that were started five minutes ago. You want are sites associated with trusted institutions that have been around for awhile and have a proven track record of reliability and integrity. Such sites may include those run by government agencies, non-profit organisations, foundations, or colleges and universities.
- **Look for sites / publications / news outlets / research with expertise** You wouldn't go to an auto mechanic if you broke your leg, and you wouldn't go to the hospital to have your car repaired. Look for websites that specialise in the kind of information you're seeking. So if you're writing a story on a flu outbreak, check out medical websites, such as the [Centers for Disease Control](#), and so on.
- **Steer clear of commercial source** - Sites run by or research done by companies and business, chances are whatever information they're presenting will be tilted in favour of their product. That's not to say corporate sites should be excluded entirely. But be wary.
- **Beware of Bias** - Many sites / publications / news outlets / research institutions are run by groups that have a bias in favour of one political party or philosophy. A conservative website isn't likely to report objectively on a liberal politician, and vice versa. Steer clear of sites with a political ax to grind and instead look for ones that are non-partisan. If you can't you might present both perspectives and let the audience know that this is a decisive issue.
- **Check the Date** - You need the most up-to-date information available
- **Avoid Anonymous Authors** - If someone is willing to put their name on something they've written, chances are they stand by the information it contains. And if you have the name of the author, you can always Google them to check their credentials.
- **Check the Links** - Reputable websites often link to each other. You can find out which other websites link to the site you're researching by conducting a link-specific Google search. Enter the following text into the Google search field, replacing "[WEBSITE]" with the domain of the site you're researching: link:http://www.[WEBSITE].com. The search results will show you which websites link to the one you're researching. If lots of sites are linking to your site, and those sites seem reputable, then that's a good sign.

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Evaluating Credibility (Humans)

- Who is this source and what are his/her credentials in this topic?
- If it's an expert, does the source have any publications in peer reviewed (scholarly/professional) publications, on the Web or in hard copy? (If an author does not have peer reviewed articles published, this does not mean that she or he does not have credible information, only that there has been no professional "test" of the author's authority on that subject.)
- Is the organisation behind the source considered reputable?
- How would this person know about this?
- Is anyone else telling the same story?
- Is this person providing evidence or just making assertions?
- Does this source have anything at stake? / Are they affected by the story in some sort of way? Could this impact the information?

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation Bias

"subconscious tendency to seek and interpret information and other evidence in ways that affirm our existing beliefs, ideas, expectations, and/or hypotheses. Therefore, confirmation bias is both affected by and feeds our implicit biases. It can be most entrenched around beliefs and ideas that we are strongly attached to or that provoke a strong emotional response.

How to Thwart Your Confirmation Bias

- “Counter-argue your story hypothesis,” or source’s assertion.
- Actively seek out contrary information.
- Rigorously test and verify every fact or assertion of fact before you publish, so you’ll be able to stand by the accuracy of your work later.



Attribution

Attribution simply means telling your readers where the information in your story comes from or who is being quoted. Information from records, reports, documents etc should be hyperlinked where possible. If no hyperlink is available, the name should be given. Try to keep things simple, long attributions are disturbing, for example you can say **a recent government report** and then hyperlink so it's less disturbing to read. You can also say **Xinhua reported** and then link to the news report. sometimes you may want to give the full title though - I can help case by case.

Generally, attribution for humans you've interviewed means using a source's full name and job title or their relevance to the story if that's relevant. (e.g. a student of the school, a customer of the product).

If you can hyperlink with a quality source in English do that. If you can only hyperlink in Chinese as it's the only real credible source of course, go ahead but your story should not be full of Chinese sources if it's for an international audience. If you do hyperlink in Chinese it's polite to state that the link is in Chinese. (Link in Chinese).

Attribution - Quotes

Generally, attribution means using a source's full name and job title if that's relevant. Information from sources can be paraphrased or quoted directly, but in both cases, it should be attributed.

Keep in mind that on-the-record attribution — meaning a source's full name and job title are given — should be used whenever possible. On-the-record attribution is inherently more credible than any other type of attribution for the simple reason that the [source](#) has put their name on the line with the information they've provided.

But there are some cases where a source might not be willing to give full on-the-record attribution. Let's say you're an investigative reporter looking into allegations of corruption in city government. You have a source in the mayor's office who is willing to give you information, but he's worried about repercussions if his name is revealed. In that case, you as the reporter would talk to this source about what kind of attribution he is willing to commit to. You are compromising on full on-the-record attribution because the story is worth getting for the public good.

Here are some examples of different kinds of attribution.

Source – Paraphrase - The big bad wolf said he was going to destroy the homes of the little pigs and then eat them.

Source – Direct Quote - “I’ll huff and i’ll puff and blow your house down, then i’ll make bacon out of you!” **said** the big bad wolf.

Reporters often use both paraphrases and direct quotes from a source. Direct quotes provide immediacy and a more connected, human element to the story. They tend to draw the reader in.

Source – Paraphrase and Quote - The big bad wolf told the pigs he was going to destroy their homes and then eat them. “I’ll make bacon out of you!” The big bad wolf said.

Attribution

<https://www.thoughtco.com/attribution-when-writing-news-stories-2074313>

Different Types of Attribution

In his book "News Reporting and Writing," [journalism professor Melvin Mencher](#) outlines four distinct types of attribution:

1. On the record: All statements are directly quotable and attributable, by name and title, to the person making the statement. This is the most valuable type of attribution.

Example: "The U.S. has no plans to invade Iran," said White House press secretary Jim Smith.

2. On Background: All statements are directly quotable but can't be attributed by name or specific title to the person commenting.

Example: "The U.S. has no plans to invade Iran," a White House spokesman said.

3. On Deep Background: Anything that is said in the interview is usable but not in a [direct quotation](#) and not for attribution. The reporter writes it in his own words.

Example: Invading Iran is not in the cards for the U.S.

4. Off the Record: Information is for the [reporter's](#) use only and is not to be published. The information also is not to be taken to another source in hopes of getting confirmation.

You probably don't need to get into all of Mencher's categories when you're interviewing a source. But you should clearly establish how the information your source gives you can be attributed.

Accuracy & Fact Checking Checklist

<https://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2011/01/04/my-version-of-craig-silvermans-accuracy-checklist/>

While Reporting

Ask sources to spell name & title; then verify what you wrote

Record or transcribe interviews

When someone cites numbers, ask for (and check) source

Ask “how do you know that?”

Seek documentation

Verify claims with reliable sources

Save links and other research

Ask sources what other reports got wrong

While writing

Note facts that need further verification

Cut and paste (with attribution) quotes from digital documents.

BBC Style Guides

BBC News style guide

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/collections/news-style-guide>

Numbers

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/articles/art20130702112133541>

Accuracy & Fact Checking Checklist

Final Checks Before Submission

Numbers & Math (have someone check your math)

Names & Titles (people, books etc.) & Locations

Compare quotes to notes/recording/transcript

Check attribution (insert link if from the web)

Definitions

Verify URLs (check them and check whether cited content is still there)

Phone numbers (call them)

Spelling & Grammar

Spellchecker Errors

Have you assumed anything? (If so, verify, hedge or remove.)

If you have any doubts, recheck with the original source.

Where your understanding is weak, read the final copy to someone who does understand.

OTHER

- NPR Ethics Handbook
- <https://www.npr.org/ethics#12>
- San Jose Mercury News Checklist
- <https://regisjesuitjournalism.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/accuracy20checklist202.pdf>
- 7 steps to better fact-checking
- <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2014/aug/20/7-steps-better-fact-checking/>
- [Accuracy checklists](#) via Craig Silverman , author of Regret the Error
- [Steve Buttry's Expanded Version](#) of Craig Silverman's Accuracy Checklist
- [Accuracy Checklist for Journalists](#), Reynolds Center for Business Journalism
- [Accuracy tips](#) from E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
- [Accuracy tip sheet](#) from Mathew Lee, as part of the Knight Citizen News Network