

Self Fact-Checking for Journalists

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Fact checking is the process of using a third-party to verify all factual material in a story prior to publication. You'll be working together to produce an article of unassailable accuracy and unimpeachable sourcing, answering potential critics before you go to press. However, as independent journalists you may not have access to fact checkers, so here are some best practices for checking your own work.

- 1) While you are writing the article, be sure to document your fact finding as best you can so there is a paper trail of where you found what information.
- 2) Begin by organizing the sources you used to write the story. These might include contact information for sources you interviewed, website addresses, copies of articles, etc.
- 3) Highlight areas of potential concern. If a fact is particularly controversial, or you are concerned that your sources might be shaky, indicate this. It will be a reminder for you to pay special attention to potential trouble spots.
- 4) Ask a third party to read through your story, underlining all facts within the story, including biographical details (names, ages, etc), company names, locations, years, statistics and figures, quotes, etc. This unbiased set of eyes will hopefully be able to pull out pieces you may miss due to your familiarity with the piece.
- 5) Do another read through of the story and be sure that all facts in the story are underlined
- 6) Begin methodically checking the underlined facts in the story using qualified, reliable information sources and your notes.
- 7) It is a good idea to check quotations; this can be done when you are originally gathering the information, try repeating back what they said and ask if you understood correctly, or check recordings, emails, or other primary source information that you pulled the quotation from. You can also check the quote after the fact by contacting the person and reading the quote to her. It is advisable to only share the quote and not other pieces of the story.
- 8) While fact checking for yourself, be sure to keep a record of what you are changing and how you are reworking the story so it is accurate. As the reporter, you will ultimately make the call about fact checking changes but you want to be able to document and prove where facts were sourced from. When you are comfortable with the article and any changes that have been made, you're ready to go to press.