Digital Media and Journalism Accuracy Checklist Laurier Brantford

Before submitting your assignments and articles, ensure that you have completed this checklist.

INITIAL CHECKS

1. Run spellcheck, review suggestions and correct any actual errors.
2. Test hyperlinks.
3. Call phone numbers.

FACT-CHECKING: TEXT (in print and on screen)

Print your story and underline each fact in it. Then, put a ruler under each line as you read through the text.

4. Double-check each fact, including:
    a. Names and titles of people, places and companies.
        i. Does each second reference (Jones) have a first reference (Mary Jones)?
    b. Numbers.
        i. Are the numbers accurate?
        ii. Is it millions or billions?
        iii. Are the percentages correct?
    c. Dates and ages – Watch references to "next month" or "last month" when the month is changing.
    d. Quotes – Are quotes accurate and properly attributed? Have you fully captured what each person meant?
    e. Superlatives – Do you have a source that proves that something is the biggest, oldest, etc.?

Grammar

5. Check each sentence for:
    a. Subject-verb agreement.
    b. Consistent use of either the present or the past tense.
    c. Pronoun-noun agreement.
    d. Plurals and possessives.
    e. Punctuation.

6. Spelling.
    a. Read the story backwards, checking the spelling of each word.

Context, Fairness and Completeness

7. Context – Does the reader have the context to understand the story?
    a. Define or eliminate unfamiliar terms, such as acronyms.
    b. Define or eliminate jargon.
    c. Explain any unfamiliar processes or institutions that are relevant to the story (e.g., if your topic has a legal dimension, briefly explain the relevant laws).
    d. Put relative size in context (e.g., why an amount of money is considered small or large).
    e. Would data visualization help to establish context?

8. Fairness and completeness.
    a. Have all relevant stakeholders been contacted and given a chance to express their views?
    b. Have you addressed evidence that might suggest alternative interpretations?
    c. Does the story leave any important questions unanswered?

FACT-CHECKING: DATA VISUALIZATIONS (graphs, charts, tables etc.)

9. Accuracy.
    a. Have data visualizations been prepared using the appropriate data?
        i. Check that you have used the correct rows and columns to prepare graphs and charts.
    b. Double-check all calculations performed.
        i. Ensure that percentages, growth rates, etc., have been properly calculated.
    c. Ensure all data visualizations have been correctly labeled.
    d. Verify that the appropriate units have been disclosed (e.g., Canadian dollars or American dollars, Fahrenheit or Celsius).

10. Transparency.
    a. Have documents used to assemble data visualizations available for your instructor's scrutiny.
    b. Examine your data visualizations to make sure they are not cluttered with too much information.
    c. Ensure that any facts stated in the text are consistent with facts contained in the data visualization.
    d. Are the sources of all data clearly and accurately identified?

FACT-CHECKING: IMAGES (photos, maps, illustrations and other artwork)

11. Accuracy.
    a. Is the image appropriate to the story?
    b. Is the image adequately explained and contextualized by the text?
    c. Are people, places and other relevant information in the image accurately identified?
    d. Have all legal concerns been appropriately addressed concerning the public use of the image?

Your own common errors

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FINAL CHECKS

- Read the story aloud.
- Have someone else read it.
- Accompanying elements: Run the previous checks on the story's headlines, cutlines, sidebars, photos, graphics, videos and podcasts.

Thanks to these sources for inspiring this checklist:

- Donald W. Reynolds National Centre for Business Journalism's "Accuracy Checklist for Journalists"
- Steve Buttry's Accuracy Checklist
- *Detroit Free Press* Accuracy Checklist
- Daphne Gray-Grant's "Preventing goof-ups: 10 proofreading tips"
- *The New York Times'* "The Reader's Lament"
- *San Jose Mercury News* Accuracy Checklist
- Craig Silverman's Accuracy Checklist