

# Accuracy Checklist for Journalists

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## I. Facts

Check these first three items while your story is on the screen:

- 1. Run **spell-check**, review suggestions and correct any actual errors.
- 2. Click **links**.
- 3. Call **phone numbers**.

Use a printout of the story for the remaining checks:

- 4. Put a **ruler under each line** as you read the text. **Underline every fact**, and then double-check each one, including:
  - a) **Names** and **titles** of people, places and companies – *Also, does each second reference (Jones) have a first reference (Mary Jones)?*
  - b) **Numbers** and **calculations** – *Do the numbers add up? Is it millions or billions? Are the percentages correct?*
  - c) **Dates** and **ages** – *Watch references to “next month/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** – *What’s your source that something is the biggest, oldest, etc.?*

## II. Grammar

5. Check each sentence for correct use of:

- a) **Subject-verb agreement** – *Also, are you consistent in your use of either the present or the past tense to tell the story?*
- b) **Pronoun-noun agreement**.
- c) **Plurals** and **possessives**.
- d) **Punctuation**.

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## III. Spelling

- 6.** Read the story **backwards**, checking the **spelling** of each word. Here's a [dictionary](#).

## IV. Fairness and context

- 7. Terms** – *Define or eliminate unfamiliar terms, such as acronyms and jargon.*
- 8. Fairness** – *Have all stakeholders been contacted and given a chance to talk?*
- 9. Missing** – *Does the story leave any important questions unanswered?*
- 10. Context** – *Does the reader have the context to understand the story?*

## V. Your own common errors

- 11.** \_\_\_\_\_
- 12.** \_\_\_\_\_

## VI. Final checks

- 13. Read** the story **aloud**.
- 14.** Have **someone else** read it.
- 15. Accompanying elements** – *Run the previous checks on the story's headlines, cutlines, sidebars, photos, graphics, videos and podcasts. Check for inconsistencies.*

Thanks to these sources for inspiring this checklist:

- [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](#)