

by Barbara Gray

HOW TO FACT CHECK LIKE A PRO

Fact Checking

Write fast, but fact check slowly — Create a habit to get your brain out of writing mode, and into factchecking mode.

Change the font, background color, or text size to trick your brain that it's looking at something new.

Get physical with your work, print it out, then go through every sentence and circle every fact.

Read your work aloud to make sure you catch anything you missed, like spell check errors.

Most common errors

- Names, titles, place names
- Statistics
- References to time, distance, date, season, location, physical descriptions
- Argument or narrative that depends on fact
- Historical facts
- Beware of superlatives

Primary Sources

- Government reports (infodocket.com, everycrsreport.com)
- Data (state, federal and municipal open data portals)
- Court documents (search LexisNexis or courtreference.com)
- Original scholarly research (found in Google Scholar™, or open source repositories like academicworks.cuny.edu or Base-Search.net)

Secondary sources found in databases at work, and in your public, state and university libraries

- Search articles in databases like Nexis® or LexisNexis Newsdesk®
- Search for data on Statista.com or Data.gov

Ask an expert: a scholar, government agency employee, or industry representative.

Search fact-checking sites to see if the information has already been debunked.

How to Detect Fake News

- 1 Be Skeptical** — Verify before you share. Journalists assume they are wrong, and seek corroborating evidence.
- 2 Create your own habit of fact checking** — it's a civic survival skill and duty in a "post-truth" world. Misinformation and disinformation are being used as weapons, to "undermine trust, create divisions, and foment chaos," in our country.
- 3 "Smell test" or "Gut check"** — Does this seem unbelievable to you? Either way, verify it.
- 4 Do they cite their sources of information?** — Then you should go to the original source.
- 5 Be aware of your own confirmation bias** — "subconscious tendency to seek and interpret information and other evidence in ways that affirm our existing beliefs, ideas, expectations
- 6 Is the article or information making you really angry and emotional?** — Maybe because it was manufactured to exploit your biases.
- 7 Who says?**
 - Scrutinize the publication sharing the story they are quoting.
 - Check the "About Us" page

How do they know?

- Have you heard of them? What makes them an authoritative source for anything? Are they biased?
- Does the story only present one side of a debate?

Does this news turn up on any trusted site?

- Search to see whether or how the news is being reported on legitimate journalism sites

What Don't I Know?

- What facts are being left out? Do other reliable sources challenge these facts?