

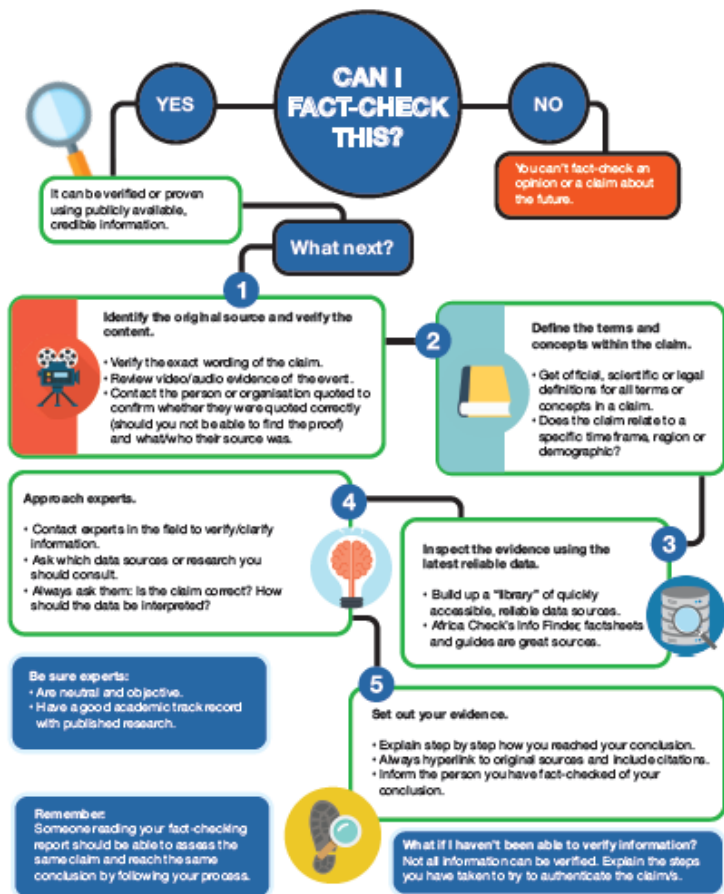
Sorting facts from fiction – the role of fact-checking in a post-truth era

Training by Raymond Joseph
For Forum of Community Journalists
June 2022

Checking the facts

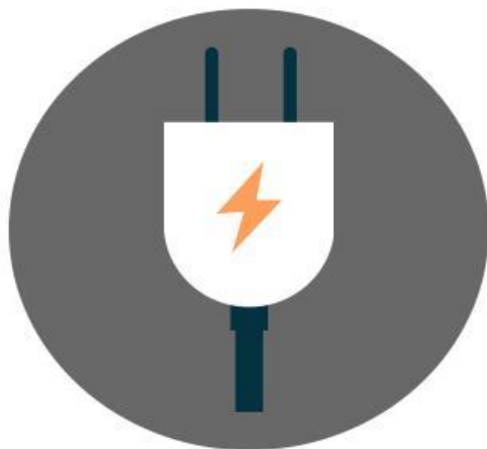
Follow AfricaCheck's five step fact-check to ensure proper content verification

Source: www.africacheck.org



- Fact-checking should be part of your everyday workflow as a journalist, it's not something you do as an afterthought
- Question all sources (even trusted sources can get it wrong);
- Explain the quality of the sources to readers in your reporting
- Avoid anonymous sources as far as possible, first try and get someone to give you the information on-the-record
- If you have to quote anonymous sources, tell your readers why
- Take nothing for granted, check everything;
- Avoid single sources; always seek other sources to confirm information;
- If sources contradict one another, report the contradictions
- If you're not sure about the veracity of a tweet, FB post or website DON'T share it

ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF FACT-CHECKING IS TO START AT THE SOURCE...



- First-person - eyewitness (direct)
- First-person - via third-party (UGC)
- First-person - expert

AUTHENTICATING USER-GENERATED CONTENT



Who?



Watt



When?



Where?



Why?

Anonymous sources

Our journalists will **refrain from quoting or attributing information to anonymous sources**, **Rare exceptions** to this rule ... if the information is deemed to be of **high news value and importance**, and **if all other means** to get the information on the record **have been exhausted**.

When dealing with sources, **always question motives before promising anonymity**.

Avoid using anonymous sources to express **negative opinions** or make **negative charges** about an individual or organization.

In the rare cases in which anonymous sources are approved ... we will **tell readers or viewers why anonymity was granted in the story**.

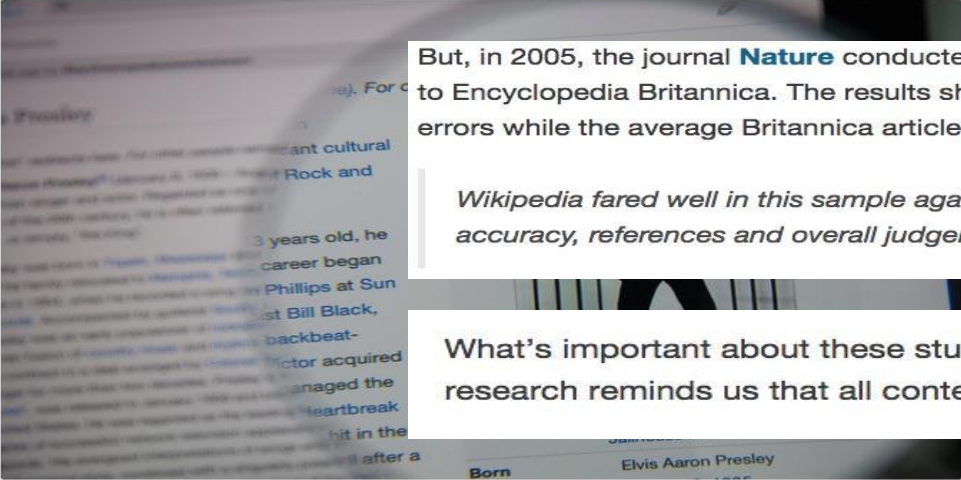
Always identify to the fullest extent possible the nature of the source, including qualifications and biases that can aid the reader in determining the validity of the information.

You should **consult first with your assigning editor before granting a blanket promise of confidentiality to any source**

Reference sources

June 10, 2015 6.19am SAST

Why it's time the world embraced Wikipedia



But, in 2005, the journal **Nature** conducted a study comparing the accuracy of Wikipedia to Encyclopedia Britannica. The results showed that the average Wikipedia article had four errors while the average Britannica article had three. A more **recent study** found that:

Wikipedia fared well in this sample against Encyclopedia Britannica in terms of accuracy, references and overall judgement.

What's important about these studies is not Wikipedia's accuracy rate. Rather, the research reminds us that all content contains errors.

Constantly correcting content – like what you find on Wikipedia – has got people all shook up. From www.shutterstock.com

“Also: please note that we NEVER link to Wikipedia,” reads the email about an article for The Conversation Africa. I'm not surprised. The same sentiment is expressed in many course documents at **universities** and schools.

Wikipedia, the pariah of content resources, is frequently considered an unacceptable and unreliable source of information. It's **critiqued** as being “a mish-mash of truth, half truth, and some falsehoods”.

Did Obama ignore human rights issues in Ethiopia?

No, but the claim refuses to go away

Fact-check: <https://goo.gl/7VCgjr>

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Published by Tadius Magazine November 27th, 2018 in Podcast. Closed



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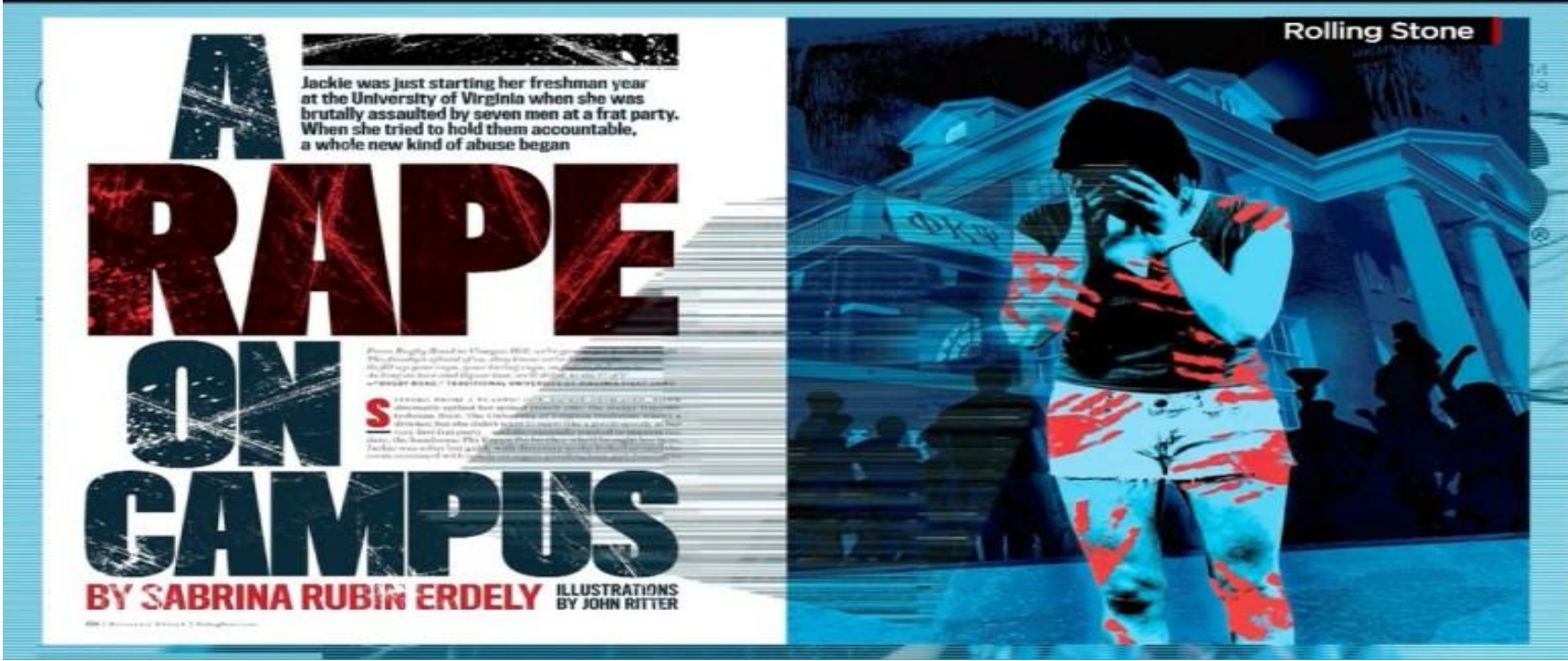
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First-person eyewitness



The rape that wasn't – a failure of journalism

- “Jackie”, a freshman at the University of Virginia tells *Rolling Stone* how she was raped by seven men at a fraternity party;
- Says friends discouraged her from reporting it for fear of her being socially ostracised;
- When *Rolling Stone* began to investigate the rape, the staff at UVA reacted in a defensive manner;
- The same story alleged that at least two other gang rapes had occurred at the same fraternity house;
- Alarm bells ignored as RS's fact-checking protocols fail;
- After publication journalist has doubts and RS retracts the story, but archived version lives on;
- Police investigation finds no proof rape ever happened.

Background:

Archived original story: <https://goo.gl/vjLDuL>

investigation debunks rape story: <https://goo.gl/KLZ2Hd>

'Investigative reporters working on difficult, emotive or contentious stories often have blind spots. It is up to their editors to insist on more phone calls, more travel, more time, until the reporting is complete.'

- From Columbia University report

The warning signs that were missed

- *Small and important checkable details from Jackie's account not independently verified;*
- Date of frat house party;
- One of the alleged fraternity rapists was a lifeguard who Jackie refused to name;
- Jackie's friends all "declined" to comment;
- The identity of the alleged rapists;
- The source of the allegations about the other gang rapes.

The result: severe damage to both Rolling Stones' and the reporter's reputation

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