

# Tip sheet for verifying images

It takes a long time to build a reputation as a journalist who can be trusted - but you can easily harm your credibility by sharing “fake news” or photos.

So, ALWAYS check first before sharing. And if it isn't from a credible source, or if you haven't checked yourself and confirmed its veracity, DON'T.SHARE.IT.

Before sharing, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you know the intent of the person who took the photo?
- Does the photo make you sad or angry, or evoke other strong feelings? That's often what who shares fakery intends to achieve - and an indication that something's not quite right about it.

Important questions to ask yourself when trying to verify a photograph:

1. When was the picture first used? Does it predate the use you're verifying?)
2. Do you know who took the photo? Knowing who took it means you may be able to contact them to ask for further information and context.
3. What is the context in which it was used? Check if it was previously used in a different context, possibly even in another country.
4. What are people wearing? Do their clothes fit the style of the country where the picture was supposedly taken?
5. What is the weather like in the photo? Deep snow or ice in a photo taken during the northern summer suggests the picture is either old or from somewhere else.
6. Look for road signs, shopfronts, billboards and vehicle number plates. Does the language fit the photo's supposed location? It could also give you clues as to where it was taken.

7. Look for distortions along the edges of people or objects. These are usually easy to spot and indicate that a picture may have been poorly manipulated.
8. In nature, there are often slight variations in light, colour and shades. If a photo has been digitally manipulated there are often large areas that are that are uniform in colour, so you should be able to see if something has been added or removed.
9. Look out for non-standard photograph shapes or sizes. Odd shapes or crops can be an indication that the photo has been edited to remove important context.

If you're looking at a reasonably sharp photo with more than one person in it, look at their eyes to see if the light reflected in them is consistent.

10. If something is too good to be true, it often is untrue. Trust your gut and check and check properly before sharing.
11. Fact-checking should be part of your everyday workflow as a journalist, it's not something you do as an afterthought
12. Question all sources (even trusted sources can get it wrong);
13. Explain the quality of the sources to readers in your reporting
14. Always been sceptical. Your default should be verify, verify, verify.
15. The bottom line is if you're not sure, don't share. You can be part of the solution to "fake news," or part of the problem.

This tip-sheet is in part based on previous fact-checking blogs done by Raymond Joseph for [Africa Check](#) and [The Global Investigative Journalism Network \(GIJN\)](#)

### **Useful resources**

Africa Check/FOJO fact-checking and verification toolkit <https://bit.ly/3pXhO26>  
Full Fact: Fact-checking toolbox <http://bit.ly/2IcdZjv>  
Full Fact: How to spot misleading images online <https://bit.ly/2XASMqn>  
FirstDraftNews photo verification guide <https://bit.ly/3pZXH3l>  
FirstDraftNews video verification guide <https://bit.ly/3pYmRiC>  
Seven vital browser plugins for newsgathering and verification <https://bit.ly/3ndc9Db>

### **Fact-Checking toolkits**

Raymond Joseph's fact-checking tools <https://goo.gl/hkPsWE>

Ossint Essentials (a selection of free fact-checking tools for different platforms  
<https://goo.gl/Xf8tiR>

Malachy Browne's verification tools <http://bit.ly/2IbgMtj>

### **Fact-checking using a mobile device:**

Africa Check guide to verifying photos on your smartphone: <https://bit.ly/3xnL9Dg>

GIJN: Four quick ways to verify images on a smartphone: <https://bit.ly/387EL8O>

France24, the Observers: How can I use my phone to verify photos? <https://bit.ly/3dqH35O>

Compiled by Raymond Joseph

[rayjoe@iafrica.com](mailto:rayjoe@iafrica.com)

Phone/WhatsApp: +27(0)83 264-5396

Feel free to share - but please remember that attribution is journalism 101. Thank you.