



Accuracy Checklist

[Society of Professional Journalists](#)

Do you have a high level of confidence about the facts in your story and the sources that are providing them? If not, can you tell your story in a more accurate manner? If you have any doubts about your sources, can you delete them or replace them and achieve a higher likelihood of reliability?

Have you attributed or documented all facts?

Have you double-checked the key facts?

Can you provide the properly spelled name and accurate telephone number of every source cited?

Are you highly confident that all the factual statements in your story reflect the truth?

Are you prepared to defend publicly your fact checking and whatever other measures that were taken to verify your story?

Are the quotes in your story presented fairly, in context?

Are you quoting anonymous sources? Why are you using those. Are you prepared to defend publicly the use of those sources?

Are you using any material documents or pictures provided by anonymous sources? Why? What is your level of confidence about the validity of this material? Are you prepared to defend publicly the use of that material?

Have you described persons, minority groups, races, cultures, nations, or segments of society - e.g. business people, Viet Nam veterans, cheerleaders - using stereotypical adjectives? Are such descriptions accurate and meaningful in the context presented?

Have you used potentially objectionable language or pictures in your story? Is there a compelling reason for using such information? Would the story be less accurate if that language or picture were eliminated?

Do your headlines (or broadcast promos or teases) accurately present the facts and context of the story to which they are referring?

Accuracy Checklist: San Jose Mercury News

[David Yarnold](#), the executive editor of the San Jose Mercury News, developed this accuracy checklist. As they move through the stories, editors have to answer the following questions among others:

Is the lead of the story sufficiently supported?

Has someone double-checked, called or visited all the phone numbers, addresses, or Web addresses in the story? What about the names and titles?

Is the background material required to understand the story complete?

Are all the stakeholders in the story identified and have representatives from that side been contacted and given a choice to talk?

Does the story pick sides or make subtle value judgments? Will some people like this story more than they should?

Is something missing?

Are all the quotes accurate and properly attributed, and do they capture what the person really meant?

The checklist, which Yarnold printed and some editors posted on their computers, began as an experiment. Yarnold gave one team of thirty reporters and editors a checklist to use in producing stories and another team worked without a checklist. The group was able to follow the checklist about 80 percent of the time and required 20 percent fewer corrections than the group without it.

You may reuse this material as long as the authors and ACES are credited.