

## CHECKING AND DOUBLE-CHECKING THE FACTS



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News reporting often happens quickly. When an event occurs, people may hear about it first on social media—Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, for instance. Journalists must balance the need to get a story out quickly to readers, while making sure the facts they report are accurate.

For most news organizations, accuracy wins every time. For the Toronto Star, accuracy is the top item in its “journalism standards” policy.

“Being accurate means verifying information before publishing and correcting mistakes when they happen,” says Kathy English, the Star’s Public Editor. She handles readers’ questions about reporting and makes sure that everything the Star publishes meets its high standards for accuracy.

She says that her job is to explain journalism to readers and the concerns of readers to journalists.

When someone questions something in an article, English talks to Star reporters and editors to make sure that the facts in their article have been gathered in a way

that is ethical and accurate. If she finds out that something is incorrect, she makes sure it is corrected quickly.

“We hear from 1,000 people a month. We deal with more than 350 issues a month. Last year, we published more than 1,200 corrections,” said English.

Journalists gather information for news articles in three main ways: interviewing

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people, reading information from another source (research) and observing it with their own eyes.

English says the Star makes sure its reporting is “radically transparent.” That means every journalist must be able to explain why they reported a fact, how they gath-

ered it and why they believe it is accurate.

For instance, when a reporter interviews someone, they must always be skeptical about what the person is telling them and not take it at face value. Good reporters ask questions to draw out the correct information.

And when a reporter is using a written source, like a scientific study, to get facts for an article, it is their job to ensure that source is accurate and reliable.

Whether readers get their news from the Star or another source, it’s important that the people who have reported that news can be trusted to provide accurate information.

“A trusted news organization operates from clearly stated ethical principles,” says English.

If a member of the public isn’t satisfied with the response to their concern from English’s office, they can take it to the National NewsMedia Council, which looks further into the reporting to determine whether it was fair and accurate.



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## JOURNALISM 101

### THE 5 WS (AND AN H!)



News articles give readers the facts about an event. Journalists often think about reporting "the five Ws."

They are: Who, What, Where, Why and When. There is also an H: How.

That means, an article should tell readers what happened, who was involved, where and when it happened, and then possibly also why and how it happened.

Let's say a reporter has been sent out to cover a protest march. She will want to gather information on what the protest is about, who is marching and why they are doing it. She will also make sure she tells readers when and where the demonstration took place. She may also find out how the protest was put together or how things got to the point where people felt they had to march.

Of course, the article will also cover things that happened at the march, and give background information about the event, to give the reader all the information about it they can.

### DIG DEEPER

#### LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

- The Toronto Star has a Journalistic Standards Guide that lists the things it values, including accuracy.

[READ MORE](#)

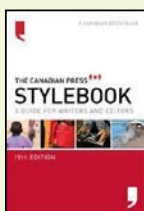
- Kathy English, the Star's Public Editor, writes columns about journalism and reporting. Here is more information about her, as well as her past columns and a link to recent corrections.

[READ MORE](#)

### DID YOU KNOW?

#### SPELLING COUNTS!

Journalists have a special type of dictionary that tells them how to spell certain words that may not be in the average dictionary, as well as when to capitalize words—for instance, a movie title—and when to use abbreviations, for instance, in a date. The Toronto Star's stylebook is based on the Canadian Press Stylebook.



### EDUCATION CONNECTION

#### ACCURACY AND TRANSPARENCY

##### Discuss!

This article talks about the importance of accuracy in journalism. Why do you think that getting the facts right is so important? Who can be affected if the facts are wrong? Is it possible for journalists to get the facts right every time? (Why or why not?)

##### Check it out!

Look up the words "ombudsperson" and "ombudsman."

##### Investigate!

Kathy English is the Toronto Star's Public Editor. What does that mean, and what does she do? Use information from the article as a starting point. Then, use the Internet to find out a bit more about her and what she does. Why is her job so important? Find one or two similar examples at other news organizations (for instance, CBC, The Globe and Mail) and list their titles and job descriptions.