Fact checks:
Research recommendations and checklist

Step 1: Production

☐ Act fast. People are more likely to believe the things we hear repeated. Fact-check early to reduce the likelihood of inaccurate claims being repeated.

☐ Seek corrections. Ask claimants to correct on the record and publish the correction in the original fact-check. Fact-checks are significantly more effective when they come from the same source who produced the misinformation to begin with.

Step 2: Content

☐ Don’t stop at saying that something is wrong. Explain why, and tell your audiences what the correct answer is if you have it, to update their knowledge for the long-term.

☐ Don’t phrase your headline as a question. Phrase it as the answer you wish audiences to remember.

☐ Check that every headline has, where possible:
  • A clear object. (Avoid indeterminate references like “This picture” or “This post” and instead use more descriptive references like “A viral post”)
  • A claim. (To get readers to update their beliefs, we need to refute – link back to/challenge the original claim)
  • A clear verdict on the claim’s accuracy.
  • An explanation for the verdict.

☐ Be transparent about what you don’t know – but specify where uncertainty lies. As fact checkers, we have a duty to be clear about evidence gaps. But be specific when you reference uncertainty, to avoid leaving readers with the feeling that nothing can be trusted.
Step 3: Format

- An image can draw attention on social media. But text is best for conveying information.
- **Only include images that support your conclusions.** An image which mirrors the conclusions of a fact-check can make it easier to remember, but an image that tells a different story than the text can undermine its conclusions.
- Use a clean layout that doesn’t distract your audiences. Side adverts, pop ups, and other elements can all divert attention from your fact check.
- Use short, single column paragraphs.

Step 4: Publicity

- Try to focus on disinformation your audiences might have heard rather than overamplifying unsubstantiated claims. When you publicise a fact check, you are also giving the claim renewed exposure – especially if you bring it to the attention of people who wouldn’t see it otherwise. **So always ask yourself: is the claim worth the attention?** Is there a fire to put out, or are we adding to the smoke?

Further reading:

- [Full Fact](fullfact.org)
- [Africa Check](africacheck.org)
- [Chequeado](chequeado.com)