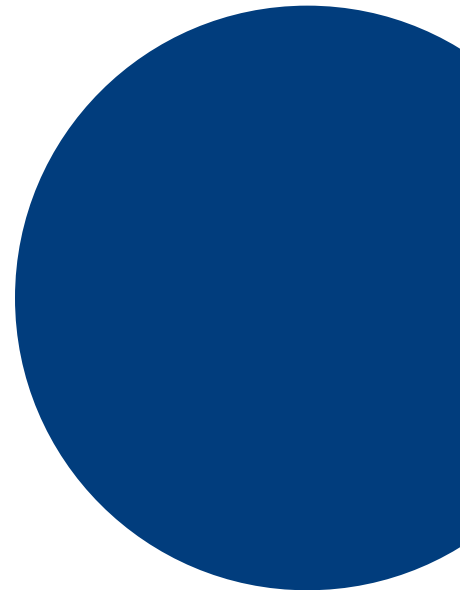


Fact Checking: 5 Things Every Book Author Should Know

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Independent fact checking is an important step in preparing your non-fiction manuscript for publication. It's well worth the money to know you have verified and properly attributed your content, and have a stronger book for it.



1. What Is a Fact Checker?

A fact checker is an editorial specialist who verifies the accuracy of facts within a manuscript.

What kind of facts?

Items that a fact checker will verify include:

- **Statements**
Example: In 1972, a Toyota Corolla cost \$2,085.
- **Full names and proper spellings**
Example: Huckleberry Finn
- **Punctuation in quotations**
Example: “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”
- **Wording and attribution of quotations**
Example: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”
– Franklin Roosevelt
- **References to third-party sources**
Example: In his book *The E-Myth Revisited*, author Michael Gerber says that 80 percent of businesses fail in the first five years.

2. Why Is Fact Checking Important?

An accurate manuscript is important for establishing and maintaining your reputation as a credible author. Factual errors can undermine the success of your book.

Accuracy is also important for avoiding legal issues such as misrepresentation or copyright infringement. This can occur, for example, when a statement or quotation is not properly attributed to the correct source.

Okay, But Is Fact Checking Really Necessary?

The vast majority of non-fiction writers would be wise to have at least a basic fact check completed. Many writers overestimate the accuracy of their manuscript. Common errors from authors include:

- Assuming their memory of a fact is accurate
- Assuming “common knowledge” is accurate
- Believing that if someone else uses the information without attribution, then it’s OK for everyone to use it without attribution
- Quoting sources third- or fourth-hand rather than going to the original source
- Transcribing quotations incorrectly
- Missing categories of facts that should be verified, such as the proper legal name of a commonly known company

3. How Do I Work with a Fact Checker?

A fact checker will want a copy of your manuscript accompanied by a **checking file**.

A checking file contains the sources and references for all of the facts contained in your book. The fact checker uses the file to verify your text.

A great checking file allows your book project to run more smoothly and cost-effectively because the checker can verify information quickly in your file.

4. What Do I Include in My Checking File?

Books, Magazines, Newspapers

If your information is drawn from a book, magazine or newspaper, complete source information is essential. It not only helps the checker judge the credibility of the source, but also gives you a way to reply to any challenges made to your writing.

- Whenever possible, provide an actual copy of the book, magazine, or newspaper with a sticky attached to the appropriate page.
- If this isn't feasible, provide a photocopy of the relevant pages and make sure all source information is included.

Books: Make sure the page number and name of the book are clearly visible on the photocopy. If they aren't, write them on the photocopy.

Magazines or Newspapers: Make sure the name of the publication, the date and the page number are visible. If they aren't, write them on the photocopy.

- If you tear pages from a magazine or clip a newspaper article, make sure the name of the publication, date, and page number are visible or written down.

Personal Interviews

- Provide a recording or your notes on the interview. Underline the quote within the notes. Provide a transcript of the recording, with the quote underlined, or tell the checker approximately where the quote occurs on the tape (e.g., first ten minutes, middle, just before the end, etc.).
- If your information is drawn from a personal interview, give the checker the phone number and/or e-mail of the person you interviewed. This is because quoted material is often not found on the recording. For example, it might have been said after the recorder was turned off, or the person interviewed simply nodded or shook his head.

With potentially litigious material, it's an excellent idea to have the checker make a personal call to the interview subject, as well as checking from a recording or notes.

The Web

Some websites are authoritative, many are not. To complicate matters, the content of websites may change. By the time the checker goes to the website to verify your information, it may have disappeared.

- To avoid this problem, print out the webpage, write the web address on the page, and indicate the date you printed out the page.
- At a minimum, give the checker the website address. Simply highlight and paste the address onto your page of sources.

Advertisements

It's best to avoid using ads as factual sources—unless, of course, you're describing the ad itself. Quotations used in advertisements are often inaccurate, as art departments may omit punctuation or entire words that aren't graphically pleasing. Images in ads (e.g., a famous painting) are often altered.

- If you're using a magazine ad as your source, give the magazine to the checker with a sticky note on the page, photocopy the page, or tear it out. Provide the name, issue, and page number. The checker will compare the info on the ad to info found in more reliable sources. If the ad is the only source that can be found, it's best to at least know what magazine it ran in, when, and on what page.
- Advertisements often use statistics (“Three out of four doctors recommend...”) without context or attribution. Most checkers will look for a more solid statistic to use in its place.

Dictionaries

Dictionary definitions vary, and dictionaries change their content with each edition. On top of this, copying a dictionary definition, with all the numbers, italics, accents and so on, is a bit of a nightmare to do correctly.

If your manuscript includes a dictionary definition, give the checker the dictionary, or a copy of the page with the name and edition of the dictionary written on it. At the very least, tell the checker the name and edition of the dictionary.

5. How Much Do I Need to Be Involved During the Check?

No matter how complete the checking file, you should anticipate questions from the checker. These can feel annoying—after all, you're often exhausted after writing or being interviewed, and you're busy with other projects. But the checker's job is to make sure your manuscript is as accurate as possible, and making yourself available for questions helps the checker do a better, faster job.

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