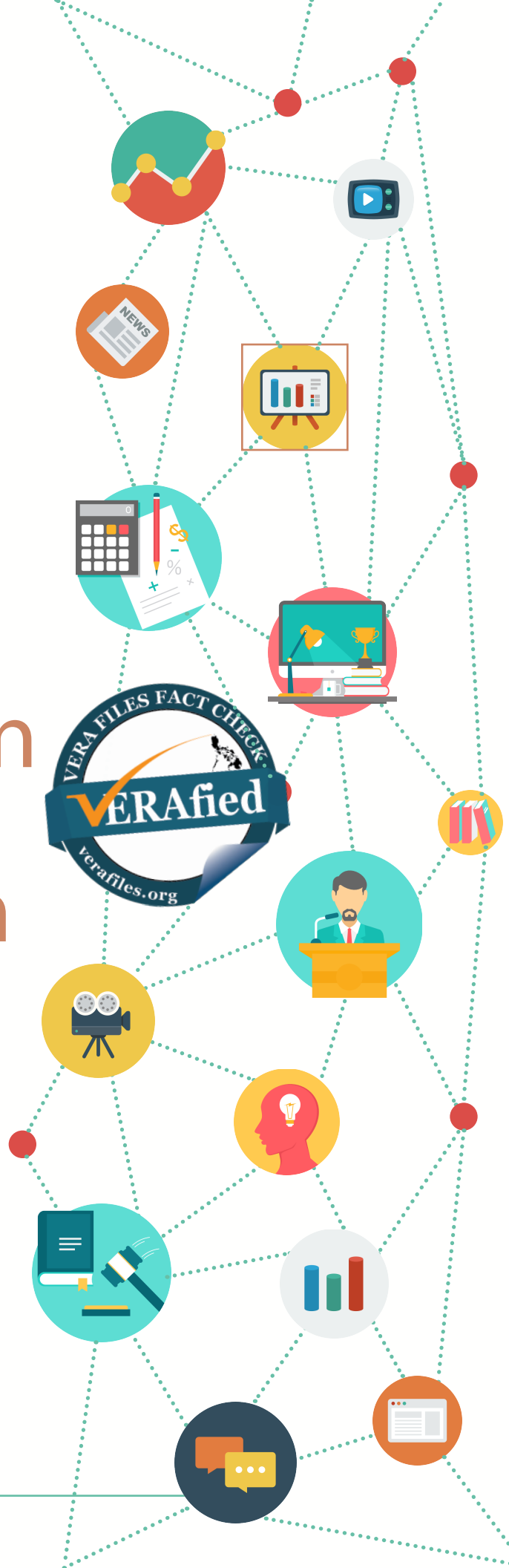


# VERAfiled: A DIY guide to fact-checking and fighting misinformation and disinformation

2021 Edition



# WHAT IS FACT-CHECKING?

Simply put, fact-checking is the act of determining if statements in a nonfictional text are true and correct. It may be done before (ante hoc) or after (post hoc) the text is published or aired.



## IS IT NEW?

Newsrooms have long employed fact checkers who verify the statements before they are printed or broadcast.

In the last decade, however, fact-checking done after the statements are made has been gaining adherents, including from the ranks of journalists, across the world. It's a response to false, misleading, or incorrect statements or claims some public officials and public figures make, intentionally or not.



## IS FACT-CHECKING RELATED TO ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNALISM?

The American Press Institute defines fact-checking as a relatively new form of accountability journalism in politics where news organizations produce "content that is branded under a special title and rate or judge the accuracy of claims by politicians or government officials." It's journalism in the public interest.



## WHAT HAS VERA FILES GOT TO DO WITH FACT-CHECKING?

Like the journalists of old, we have long been fact-checking statements of sources before they get published.



In the 2016 national elections, VERA Files, like a number of newsrooms, fact-checked statements

made by national candidates – presidential, vice presidential and senatorial – post hoc. The initiative, done with the help of journalism students of the University of the Philippines, was called “Is that so?”



We have kept this up after the elections, expanding the scope of our work to include public figures in an initiative now called “VERA Files Fact Check.” VERA Files Fact Check tracks the false claims, flip-flops, and misleading statements of public officials and figures and debunks them with factual evidence. It also debunks misinformation and disinformation spread on the internet through websites and social media.

VERA Files is a [third-party fact-checking partner](#) of Facebook.

## WHAT DOES VERA FILES FACT CHECK?



One, we check false or misleading statements and debunk them with factual evidence.



Three, we produce fact sheets and backstories.



Two, we monitor flip-flops and call out public figures.



Four, we debunk ~~fake~~ news on the Web. Or, more accurately, online misinformation and disinformation.

## CAN ANYONE BECOME A FACT CHECKER?



Yes! Fact-checking is a process comprising of steps that can be replicated. We're sharing our experience through this DIY guide.



# FALSE CLAIM



## STEP 1.

### MONITOR

press conferences, speeches, events, statements, interviews for fact-check-worthy or verifiable statements.

A statement is considered verifiable if its truthfulness and accuracy can be checked using official documents and statistics. (See list of primary sources.) For example, in a June 2020 press briefing, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque wrongly disagreed with World Health Organization data that showed the Philippines has the “fastest” rising COVID-19 cases in the Western Pacific region.

“If you’re going to divide the cases per million population, this is what we’ll get -- the highest in Western Pacific: India - 549,197; followed by Pakistan - 202,955; Bangladesh - 137,787; Indonesia - 54,010; Singapore - 43,459; then the Philippines with 35,455. So, if you divide cases per million population...it is clear -- data won’t lie. We don’t have the fastest rising cases in the Western Pacific Region. We’ll just let these data respond to the WHO report.”

In this statement, there were two things worthy of fact-checking and found to have been false.

- |          |                                                                                                             |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CLAIM #1 | The Philippines does not have the fastest-rising cases in the region.                                       |
| CLAIM #2 | India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia are classified by the WHO as part of the Western Pacific region. |



## STEP 2.

### VERIFY THE SOURCE

of the claim. Rely on firsthand sources so that the statement can be easily attributed to its source.



## STEP 3.

### RETRIEVE

the original source of the statement, preferably in video format. For example, President Duterte’s speeches as uploaded in the [RTVM website](#). Watch the video in full to provide proper context and avoid misquoting the person. Identify the exact time code the claim was uttered.



## STEP 4.

If the video is not available in government websites and other reliable video sources,

### REFER TO THE OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

of the event or a copy of the speech or statement. But be careful. The transcript may not correspond to the video. The public figure may have ad-libbed and deviated from the prepared speech or statement.

Any remark or statement made by a public figure or government agency that contradicts official documents and figures, national and international laws, and/or scientific studies.



## STEP 5.

If both the video and transcript are not available, your last recourse would be news reports. But they need to be corroborated.

### FIND AT LEAST THREE ARTICLES

containing the exact quote or reporting the statement or claim, under the same context. Cross-check the reports against one another to ensure consistency.



## STEP 6.

If the source of the statement is an online post — say, a government website or the individual’s social media account —

### MAKE A SCREEN GRAB AND PRESERVE THE EVIDENCE

in case the original post is taken down

A good example is the report of the state-run [Philippine News Agency falsely claiming](#) that 95 nations in the 27th Universal Period Review of the UN Human Rights Council found no evidence of extrajudicial killings in the country. The post was taken down five days later after the UPR called out the PNA, which simply replaced the erroneous story with another story using the same URL.



## STEP 7.

### CHECK THE CLAIM

CONDUCT ONLINE RESEARCH ON:

- Existing laws and jurisprudence, [national](#) and [international](#).
- Studies published in [academic journals](#).

CHECK OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS.

Examples are [statements of assets, liabilities and net worth or SALNs](#); [financial statements](#); [election records](#); [school records](#), and [studies from government agencies](#).

RUN A DATA ANALYSIS.

Most fact checks involving figures will require you to request the disaggregated numerical data from the concerned agency since not all of these are available online.

INTERVIEW EXPERTS

Cite other [related literature](#) and [previous media reports](#).



## STEP 8.

### WRITE UP YOUR FINDINGS AND HAVE SOMEONE GO OVER YOUR COPY.

At VERA Files, two editors vet the facts. A top editor finalizes the copy. Two senior editors sign off on the article.



## STEP 9.

In the spirit of transparency,

### PROVIDE THE LINKS TO THE SOURCES of the statement and your evidence.



## STEP 10.

### CREATE AN INFOGRAPHIC to go with your fact check. Or you can PRODUCE A VIDEO OR A PODCAST.

## EXAMPLES

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Duterte negates spox; repeats wrong, unsafe claim on using gasoline as disinfectant](#)

## #VERAfied: Villar makes two wrong claims on Israel agriculture, trade performance



“

*Sa Israel, wala silang lupa, disyerto sila...kaya ihina-hang nila 'yung kanilang mga plant sa air...Wala silang tubig, kasi ang tubig lang nila nanggagaling sa ocean, salty, dini-desalinate nila...[Yet they are net exporter (sic) of vegetable in the Middle East.*

Senator Cynthia Villar,  
Sept. 1, 2020

# FACT

There are, in fact, plantations, field crops, forests and woodlands in Israel — not just deserts — as shown in its 2013 land use map. It is also not a net exporter of vegetables in the Middle East, based on the latest available records of the World Bank.

Sources: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013 Land Use Map, Accessed Sept. 10, 2020; World Bank, 2016 Agricultural Land (% of land area) - Israel, Accessed Sept. 4, 2020; World Integrated Trade Solution, Israel Vegetable Exports By Region 2018 and Israel Vegetable Imports By Region 2018, Accessed Sept. 4, 2020



[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Bongbong Marcos falsely claims martial law horrors fabricated](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Buhay party-list Rep. Atienza privilege speech laced with false claims on anti-tetanus vaccine](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Badoy errs in claiming NDF tagged as terror group by PH, other countries](#)

## PRIMARY SOURCES

A primary source is a direct or firsthand document, speech, or any other evidence written, created, or otherwise produced during the time under study. Examples:

Speeches, press conferences,  
interviews

Press releases

Court records

Existing laws and jurisprudence, national  
and international

Legislative documents such as House/  
Senate bills, committee hearing reports

Government records, reports and  
statistics

Annual reports and financial records

Historical documents, including maps

Academic journals

Personal records, including school  
records and photographs

Official government websites

Official social media accounts of  
public figures

While many academic institutions classify news reports as a primary source, VERA Files considers them only as secondary material. They are useful jump-off points for possible fact check entries, but a fact checker must always strive to find the original source of the claims and their evidence, especially for proper context and accuracy.



# FLIP-FLOP

A sudden shift of a government official or public figure's stand on a specific policy or opinion on a certain issue.



**STEP 1.**  
**IDENTIFY** discussions and debates on current issues.



**STEP 2.**  
**MONITOR** a public official or public figure's stand on the matter through live news coverage, news reports, press releases, and his or her social media accounts.



**STEP 3.**  
**COMPARE** your monitoring results to official documents.



**STEP 4.**  
If the person who flip-flopped is a government official, **REVIEW THE OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT** or any available documentation. Taped and uncut coverage can also serve as your official source.



**STEP 5.**  
If you can't do Step 4, **LOOK FOR AT LEAST THREE** news reports that used exactly the same statement from the official being fact-checked.



**STEP 6.**  
If the statement was expressed through a **SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT**, make sure that it is the public figure's official account.



**STEP 7.**  
**COMPARE** the public figure's previous stand by using the same sources cited in Step 3.



**STEP 8.**  
If you see inconsistencies in his or her stand, **IT'S A FLIP-FLOP!**  
Start writing your piece.

## EXAMPLES

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Lorenzana contradicts military statement on China gun-pointing incident in West PH Sea](#)

[VERA FILES FACT SHEET: The evolving statements on the Recto Bank allision: a visual timeline](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Palace changes tune on Tagle's Vatican appointment](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Bong Go goes back and forth on how to treat drug addicts/crisis](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Robredo contradicts LP spokesperson; accepts offer to lead efforts vs. illegal drugs](#)



## #VERAified: NTC backpedals on ABS-CBN franchise



“  
*The NTC has directed ABS-CBN to stop operating its various TV and radio broadcasting stations nationwide 'absent a valid Congressional Franchise as required by law.'*”

National Telecommunications Commission  
May 5, 2020

## FLIP-FLOP

Two months earlier, NTC Commissioner Gamaliel Cordoba said they agency will “follow” the advice of the Department of Justice and allow ABS-CBN to operate beyond May 4 while its application for renewal remains pending in Congress.

Source: House of the Representatives of the Philippines Facebook, Proceedings for the Committee Deliberation of the Application of ABS-CBN Corporation, March 10, 2020





# FACT SHEET

A simple enumeration of facts about a particular issue, for the public's information. Statements are neither disputed nor corroborated in a fact sheet, only expounded on through basic information presented as is. This is a means of clarifying subject matters for the reader.



**STEP 1.**  
**IDENTIFY** statements or issues that can be explained or contextualized by laying out important facts.



**STEP 3.**  
**OUTLINE** the basic facts in a structural manner and write it in question-and-answer format. Questions in a fact sheet are usually limited to the five Ws (who, what when, where, why) and one H (how).



**STEP 2.**  
**RESEARCH AND GATHER** information from various primary sources such as documents or interviews.



**STEP 4.**  
**LIMIT** the number of questions to not more than six items.

**EXAMPLES** [VERA FILES FACT SHEET: COVID-19 numbers used in measuring success of gov't response explained](#)

[VERA FILES FACT SHEET: Understanding the updates on the ICC's preliminary examination into Duterte's drug war](#)

[VERA FILES FACT SHEET: What you need to know about the Senate's anti-terrorism bill](#)

[VERA FILES FACT SHEET: Three things you need to know about crimes committed by minors](#)

[VERA FILES FACT SHEET: The new way of measuring poverty in PH explained](#)

# BACKSTORY

A backstory is a brief history or background of the issue at hand.



## ADDITIONAL FEATURE OR AN ADDENDUM

to our post debunking a claim or calling out a flip-flop. It seeks to provide a broader and more comprehensive context to the subject being discussed.



## CONSEQUENCE OF THOROUGH RESEARCH:

In the process of disputing or corroborating a claim, the reporter will have gathered more than enough documentation to use as evidence of fact or flip-flop.



The materials are compiled and turned into a narrative so that the reader can

## TRACE THE EVENTS LEADING TO THE STATEMENT

and how that statement is either false or a total contradiction or modification to the original statement of the one who uttered it.

## EXAMPLES

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Post on 'talking newborn' saying hard-boiled eggs a cure for COVID-19 NOT TRUE](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: Dela Rosa misleads in citing old news report on death penalty](#)

[VERA FILES FACT CHECK: School textbooks enshrine Jose Rizal as national hero needs context](#)



# FAKE NEWS

is falsified information disguised as news spread through one or several platforms, including social media, to deliberately deceive the audience and advance political, ideological, social, or economic interests.

By nature, news is not fake or falsified, so we're moving away from this term. More accurately, false and misleading information is misinformation or disinformation, with the latter intentionally spread.

Knowing how to spot it is essential to debunking it. Here are some **TELLTALE SIGNS**:



## OUTRAGEOUS OR CLICKBAIT HEADLINES

Be cautious! Many fake reports are designed to draw emotions. Watch out for ALL-CAPS HEADLINES and the use of excessive punctuations. If a “news report” you saw on your Facebook or Twitter feed makes you angry, it’s probably designed that way. Don’t share it straight away without verifying.



## SUSPICIOUS URLS

Go beyond headline and check the the URL. Does it read like the URL of your trusted news organization? Take a second look! Impostor sites steal brands by changing one character and adding words like .channel or -tv in the domain. Examples of bogus websites: aljazeera-tv.com, gma-tv.com, and theguardian.com.



## NO “ABOUT” PAGES

Many websites peddling false information aggregate content from other websites. Check their “About” pages. Legitimate news sites provide information about their organization; bogus news sites mostly don’t.



## NO BYLINES

If there’s no name attached to a report circulating online, it could be fake. Byline equals accountability, a core principle in journalism.



## BAD GRAMMAR

Look out for misspellings and bad grammar. Many fake reports are badly written.



## SATIRE?

Satirical reports by their nature are untrue, yet are sometimes shared by unscrupulous social media users as if they were. Before believing or sharing anything, check first if it is tagged as satire.



**Disinformation** is a global problem. But its spread can be contained, and its nefarious impacts curtailed, with these simple hacks. It also helps to follow fact-checking media organizations who have a dedicated team of journalists actively seeking out and debunking fake news. Here are a handful: [VERA Files Fact Check](#), [Politifact](#) and [FactCheck.org](#).

## TEACHING STUDENTS HOW TO FACT-CHECK

VERA Files Fact Check asked educators for creative ways to introduce fact-checking in the classroom. Here are some of their responses:

- Simulate a **GAME SHOW** where students would be asked to distinguish fact from opinion
- Give a **QUIZ** where students will determine which part of a statement can be fact-checked
- Conduct a **DEBATE** where students would check the accuracy of arguments presented
- Ask students to verify claims in the essays they are **PROOFREADING**
- Assign groups to compile **WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES** that spread fake news and identify why certain stories are fake
- Ask students to write **ESSAYS** on how disinformation affects their daily lives and how they can fight it



# DOs AND DON'Ts

The statement being fact-checked has to be **FIRSTHAND**.

You have to get the:



VIDEO



AUDIO

and compare it with the



**GOVERNMENT TRANSCRIPTS**  
if available

Sometimes the official transcript won't match the video, so make sure to match these.

**TRIANGULATE** if statements can't be found except in news reports. Use at least three media reports using the same quote.

For example,



"What is catching the attention, not only of the countries bordering the South China Sea, is practically the continuing tension in the South China Sea. The posturing of the naval might of the United States, of China, or other countries. That did not exist during the Arroyo administration. There was relative quiet and peace."  
- CNN Philippines



"During her (Arroyo) term there was peace and quiet in the South China Sea. One principal point is that there was no such island building factories as we experienced during the Aquino administration in the South China Sea."  
- Malaya Business Insight



"Mendoza said there was relative quiet and peace' in the South China Sea during the Arroyo administration."  
- Inquirer.net

**GO OVER SOURCES** again before publishing your fact check.

Have another fact checker go through your sources. This is to ensure that the list is complete and all the links are working.

**USE PRIMARY SOURCES** to provide evidence.

"Assume nothing is true. Go directly to the source."

- The Protext Method of Verification

Primary source is direct evidence of an event or topic such as historical and legal documents, audio and video recordings, speeches, and interviews.

But, remember, **EVEN DOCUMENTS LIE**. So corroborate what the documents say with interviews.

**BE TRANSPARENT** with your sources.

Always provide a list of sources with links, or upload the documents or screen grabs you used.

In "[VERA FILES FACT SHEET: The 'new' coronavirus strain, explained](#)," VERA Files used no less than 28 sources, including the following:

- [World Health Organization Statement on the outbreak of novel coronavirus, Jan. 30, 2020](#)
- [Nature, Genetic Mutation, Accessed Sept. 3, 2020](#)
- [Philippine Genome Center, Bulletin No. 1, Aug. 13, 2020](#)
- [medRxiv, Analysis of SARS-COV-2 Genome Sequences from the Philippines: Genetics Surveillance and Transmission Dynamics, Aug. 25, 2020](#)
- [Nature, We shouldn't worry when a virus mutates during disease outbreaks, Feb. 18, 2020](#)
- [ScienceDirect, A genetic barcode of SARS-CoV-2 for monitoring global distribution of different clades during the COVID-19 pandemic, Aug. 22, 2020](#)
- [Cell, Making Sense of Mutation, July 2, 2020](#)

This way, the readers can do their own fact-checking.

**DO NOT EDITORIALIZE.**

Let the facts speak for themselves.

A writer's opinion belongs in editorials and columns, not in news. Stick to the facts.





### A COMMITMENT TO NONPARTISANSHIP AND FAIRNESS

We fact-check claims using the same standard at every instance. We do not concentrate our fact-checking on any one side. We follow the same process for every fact check and let the evidence dictate our conclusions. We do not advocate or take policy positions on the issues we fact-check.



### A COMMITMENT TO TRANSPARENCY OF SOURCES

We want our readers themselves to be able to verify our findings. We provide all sources in detail so that readers can replicate our work, except in cases where a source's personal security may be compromised. In such cases, we provide as much information as possible.



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We are transparent about our funding sources. If we accept funding from other organizations, we ensure that funders have no influence over the conclusions we reach in our reports. We detail the professional background of all key figures in our organization and explain our organizational structure and legal status. We clearly indicate a way for readers to communicate with us.



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We explain the methodology we use to select, research, write, edit, publish, and correct our fact checks. We encourage readers to send us claims to fact-check and are transparent on why and how we fact-check.



### A COMMITMENT TO OPEN AND HONEST CORRECTIONS

We publish our corrections policy and follow it scrupulously. We correct clearly and transparently in line with our corrections policy, seeking so far as possible to ensure that readers see the corrected version.

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[newsroom@verafiles.org](mailto:newsroom@verafiles.org)

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