

Ryerson University
G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education
Magazine Fact-Checking & Research CDJN120
Course Outline Spring 2007

Instructor:	Cynthia Brouse
Instructor e-mail:	cbrouse@ryerson.ca
Instructor office:	RCC 161
Instructor office hours:	By appointment
Classroom:	RCC 205
Class time:	Tuesdays, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., May 1 to June 12

Course description

With a few exceptions, only consumer magazines in North America employ fact checkers—researchers who, independently of the writer and editor, verify every fact in an article that has been accepted for publication. Fact-checking is done by both staff and freelance researchers, sometimes by editors and copy editors, often by editorial interns. This course looks at why fact-checking is considered necessary in magazines; how it fits into the editorial process; how to set up a fact-checking copy according to industry standards; what to check and what not to check; useful research tips; judging the authority of sources; the fact-checking telephone interview; working with writers and editors; dealing with quotations; and legal and ethical considerations.

Course outcomes

At the end of this course, the student who possesses aptitude and makes an effort will be able to:

1. understand the roles and responsibilities of magazine fact-checkers, how they interact with other staff members at a magazine and where their work fits into the production process
2. explain why consumer magazines perform independent fact-checking when other media don't
3. identify the skills and characteristics required of good magazine fact-checkers
4. following Canadian consumer magazine industry standards and methods for fact-checking, determine what needs to be verified in a magazine article after it is written
5. determine the most reliable sources with which to verify that material
6. verify all facts with appropriate and authoritative sources
7. accurately record and report necessary factual changes to appropriate editorial staff
8. define libel and understand the importance of—and limits to—factual accuracy in magazines, including the use of quotations
9. respectfully and productively interact and collaborate with others in the fact-checking of a magazine article.

Course format

Classes will combine lecture and in-class practice, including a hands-on research tutorial in the library. There will be in-class and take-home assignments, as well as assigned reading and homework and a final test.

Required text

- *After the Fact: A Guide to Fact-Checking for Magazines and Other Media*, by Cynthia Brouse, beta version, 2006. You can purchase this text from the instructor for \$10.

Supplementary reading

- *The Fact-Checker's Bible: A Guide to Getting It Right*, by Sarah Harrison Smith, Anchor Books, 2004

You will also find numerous other resources on the Blackboard course management system, including web links related to the magazine industry.

Learning philosophy

You are an essential component in our learning. Without your contributions, the course will lack vitality, interaction, discussion, humour and elements essential to the overall learning venture. You have probably heard teachers say, “You won’t get anything out of this course if you don’t put something into it.” This is true. You may not have considered, however, that *your classmates* will get more out of this course if you put something into it. Your instructor expects to learn a great deal from you as well. As an adult learner, you are free to attend class or not, to take advantage of the learning opportunities available to you or not (not to mention your investment of time and money). But you are also part of a learning community. I hope you will feel some responsibility toward that community as well as to yourself. Research shows that we learn best when we collaborate with others in building meaning, knowledge and skills. As it happens, magazines are also collaborative products, relying on teamwork to a large extent to create something that is better than any one member of the team could produce on his or her own.

Blackboard course management system

We will use the Blackboard electronic course management system in this course to communicate with each other, to distribute materials, resources and assignments, to post your marks, and to hand in some assignments. I will sometimes post last-minute instructions or amendments to the course schedule. Please ensure that you are familiar with Blackboard and visit it frequently. When you registered, you were given a Ryerson matrix account, which permits you to use Blackboard. It also provides you with a Ryerson e-mail address. If the whole class activates their Ryerson e-mail accounts, and checks them regularly, Blackboard will speed up e-mail communication among the class.

Course participation grade

Ten percent of your grade will be devoted to participation, but this does not mean you will be rewarded simply for talking a lot in class. Participation will include:

Preparation: Have you completed assigned reading, and demonstrated your critical analysis and understanding of the material?

Contribution to discussion: Have you volunteered answers, asked relevant questions, expressed your own opinion and respectfully analyzed the contributions of others? Postings to the discussion boards will be included here; you will be required to post at least two comments during the course. You may be required to post some homework exercises to the discussion board, as well; these do not count toward your two postings, but reactions to others' work will.

Group skills: Have you helped to distribute group tasks equitably, shared ideas with others, assisted others, provided constructive feedback to others and exhibited tolerance and respect?

Communication skills: Have you expressed yourself clearly and concisely, using appropriate vocabulary?

Attendance: Have you attended classes and maintained punctuality?

Homework: Have you completed homework and in-class exercises and quizzes? These will not be graded, but their on-time completion will count toward your participation grade. Ungraded homework, exercises and quizzes will provide you with the opportunity to practise and receive feedback on skills and knowledge you will later be evaluated on, and to reflect on and monitor your own progress.

Assignment format

Some assignments will be handed in (and returned) electronically. Others are to be submitted in hard-copy form; see the detailed assignment sheets for each one.

To submit an assignment electronically through Blackboard: Click "View/Complete" under the relevant assignment heading. Submit only attached Word, WordPerfect or rich-text files. When submitting an attached file, please name your file as follows: SmithAChecklist.EXT where Smith is your last name; A is your first initial; Checklist is the first word in the assignment name; EXT is the three-letter file type code (.DOC for Word files, .WPD for WordPerfect, .RTF for Rich Text format). (Macintosh users please make sure you add the extensions.) Remember to use alphanumeric characters only, and no spaces or punctuation marks.

For hard-copy submissions: DO NOT USE A COVER PAGE, DUO-TANG, PORTFOLIO OR PRESENTATION FOLDER for any assignment in this course. Always put your name, student number and a name for the assignment in the upper left-hand corner of THE FIRST PAGE and STAPLE the pages together.

Keys to getting the most out of this course (and to keeping your instructor and classmates happy)

- Before you hand in an assignment, go back and re-read the assignment sheet to make sure you have done everything you were asked to do.
- Don't leave the previous step until the night before.

- Make good use of Blackboard.
- Meet your deadlines. Let your instructor know BEFOREHAND if you won't be able to meet a deadline. Perhaps other arrangements can be made.
- Read magazines—good ones and bad ones.
- Think of yourself—for now, at least—as a magazine professional, and make good use of the resources that will help you learn more about the Canadian magazine industry (including your profs).
- Have good classroom manners: don't talk while others are talking; turn off cellphones; pack out your garbage.

Assignments

Assignment	Percentage of final grade	Due date
Article on a classmate	10	<u>MONDAY</u> , May 14
*Page on instructor	—	May 8
Checklist of Facts	10	<u>MONDAY</u> , May 21
Checking journal Part I	10	<u>MONDAY</u> , May 28
Fact-checking Article on Classmate	10	June 12
Checking journal Part II	10	June 12
Scavenger Hunt: Print & Electronic Sources	20	June 5
Final test	20	June 12
Course participation	10	—

* While this assignment is not graded, on-time submission will count toward the course participation grade.

Welcome to Magazine Fact-Checking & Research! I look forward to working and learning with you.

MAGAZINE FACT-CHECKING & RESEARCH CDJN120

SPRING 2007 COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC(S)	ASSIGNMENTS GIVEN	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Week 1 May 1	What is fact-checking? Where does fact-checking fit into the editorial process? Job opportunities in fact-checking	Article on a Classmate Paragraph on instructor	
Week 2 May 8	Why do magazines employ fact-checkers? What's a fact?	• Scavenger Hunt: Print/Electronic Sources	• Paragraph on instructor
Week 3 May 15	What's a source? The Method: setting up a fact-checking copy	• Checklist of Facts	• Article on a Classmate <u>DUE MONDAY MORNING, MAY 14 THROUGH BLACKBOARD</u>
Week 4 May 22	Sources: Print sources, databases and research on the Web (a hands-on workshop in the Ryerson Library)	• Checking Journal Part I	• Checklist of Facts <u>DUE MONDAY MORNING, MAY 21, THROUGH BLACKBOARD</u>
Week 5 May 29	Case studies The fact-checking interview	• Fact-Checking Article on Classmate • Checking Journal Part II	• Checking Journal Part I <u>DUE MONDAY MORNING, MAY 28, THROUGH BLACKBOARD</u>
Week 6 June 5	Legal and ethical considerations		• Print/Electronic Sources Scavenger Hunt
Week 7 June 12	Guest speaker Final test		• Fact-Checking Article on Classmate • Checking Journal Part II