

# G i G A F A C T

## Editorial Guide

*Updated May 10, 2023*

Gigafact invites newsrooms to its platform to publish well-researched content, informative and nonpartisan in tone, that enhances the public dialogue by surfacing relevant facts and data surrounding trending internet claims and controversies — in concise “fact briefs” of about 150 words.

Contributors are chosen for their editorial excellence and alignment with the Gigafact mission to counter misinformation and protect the democratic process. They are given considerable latitude in selecting and verifying claims. This editorial guide serves to ensure quality and consistency across our growing number of partners and provide a uniform experience for readers.

The “Essentials” section lays out five required criteria for Gigafact publication aimed at producing sober and trusted content that appeals broadly across the ideological spectrum, even in these polarized times.

The “Best practices” section details our approach to more nuanced issues related to substance, tone and style, and describes how to deliver maximum value to readers.

The “Sources” section establishes our standards and preferences for sourcing facts.

Our “Approval Checklist” is a short-hand formatting of our editorial essentials for writers and editors to review before submitting briefs.

Our “FAQs” section lists answers to common questions not covered in the previous sections.

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## Essentials

Every brief must fulfill the following criteria to be published. Briefs that fail to do so will be returned with guidance on what needs to be revised.

### Claim responsiveness

Fact briefs are claim responsive, meaning they are responding to a popular and substantive claim that someone is making somewhere on the internet. When phrasing your headline question, make sure it addresses the core contention(s) of the claim.

### Definitive answers

Write questions that can be given a clear “yes” or “no” answer based on current, publicly accessible information. If data is thin or conflicting — for instance in new, rapidly developing stories — shelve the question until more information becomes available.

### Factual accuracy

Our brand identity is centered on trustworthiness. Writers and editors should double check that all the facts included in their briefs are accurate reflections of the information contained within their sources *before submitting*.

### Unbiased communication

Gigafact fact briefs seek to *inform* rather than *inflame* conversations by conveying the key factual information while avoiding political buzzwords and emotionally charged language. Practice neutrality at all stages of the process, from selecting claims to phrasing your headline questions and writing the actual briefs.

### Transparent, high quality sourcing

Each fact asserted in the body of your brief must be supported by a reputable, publicly accessible source. This is especially important when citing numerical figures or direct quotes. Ideally, use at least two primary sources other than your own in each fact brief.

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## Best practices

The following guidelines address commonly encountered topics and provide tips on how to enhance the quality of your fact briefs. Failing to fulfill one of them will not typically result in a rejection, although the Gigafact editor may highlight one and suggest an improvement.

### Context

Contributors aspire to supply not only *facts* but the *factors* behind them. Ask yourself, “If I were a reader, what background information would I hope to find in this brief to better understand the issue?” For example:

- **Policy context:** What are the relevant laws, regulations, court precedents, etc.?
- **Geographic context:** What are other states and/or countries doing?
- **Temporal context:** What are the trends overtime? What is the relevant history? How has the issue changed between the past and the present?
- **Social context:** What do public opinion polls show? Is it unusual for a candidate, politician, government, etc. to have this stance?
- **Rhetorical context:** What are interested parties saying about this issue? What are their arguments? Do they have merit?

### Conciseness

Contributors practice the use of concise language to make fact briefs readable and appealing. To this end:

- Phrase your questions so they’re engaging and easy to understand. Aim for one clause whenever possible.
- Use economical language: Ask, “How can I convey the information clearly in as few words as possible?”
- Provide a simple answer in the first sentence of your brief to anchor the reader before getting into the specifics.
- Avoid restating the claim in the body of the brief — readers can click on the claim if they wish to view it.
- Use a partial quote or paraphrase rather than transcribing a full quote. This frees up real estate to use for helpful context.

### Modest scope

Contributors think of themselves as a *small-claims court* rather than *The Supreme Court*, meaning they rule on specific claims rather than general topics (for example, “Has climate change increased storm severity in the US?” rather than “Is climate change jeopardizing our species’ survival?”). Our objective is to verify facts, not engage in political debates, discuss opinions, analyze ideologies or trace the origins of conspiracy theories.

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## **Issue-centric**

The focus is fact-checking *issues*, not prosecuting public *figures*. Contributors should separate the *claim* (the fact in question) from the *claimant* (the individual or organization making it). Most of your fact briefs should not include the name of a person in the headline question. When covering an election, you may ask a question about whether a candidate said x or supports y, but use your discretion: Does this question concern how this figure will act in office, or is it just a vehicle for one side to score political points? Will it contribute constructively to the public dialogue?

## **Rounding numbers**

Being precise can be useful, but being pedantic should be avoided. Modest rounding of decimal points, percentages, large numbers, etc. is typically fine. Relatedly, if you find a claim about how a state measures up to other states, how a state performed in a given time frame, what percentage of a state's citizens poll a given way, etc., you may phrase your questions to permit a little wiggle room.

- Example: If, while researching a claim that “Nevada has the worst ranked health care in the nation,” you find a study that ranks Nevada second-worst, rephrase the question to be more accommodating: “Is Nevada’s health care ranked one of the worst in the nation?”

## **Freshness**

Fact briefs address widely circulating claims about current events and policies. Avoid outdated and obscure topics and claims with low engagement. Avoid publishing briefs on topics that have already been written about by Gigafact or other major fact checkers. You may use the [Gigafact anthology](#) to check; do an additional Google search if needed.

## **Durability**

Contributors aim to publish durable fact briefs that have lasting validity. Avoid hyper-specific questions whose answers will quickly become obsolete. For example, rather than asking, “Did gas prices increase this week?” Pose a question with a more encompassing timeframe, such as, “Did gas prices trend upward in 2022?”

## **Avoiding value judgments**

Assessing the character or inner-workings and beliefs of an organization or individual is not a factual matter, and should be avoided. When phrasing your questions, make sure they ask about a fact that can be evaluated rather than a personal quality or trait. For example, rather than asking, “Is x individual or company biased against racial minorities?” pose a question about a specific policy topic, such as, “Does x support affirmative action?”

## **Consistency in style**

The Gigafact platform values consistency in our syntax and vocabulary in alignment with the mainstream of global media usage. As we expand into a global brand, we appreciate

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that different regions may have different standards. Generally speaking, use the AP Style Book for nuts-and-bolts grammar. You may use your discretion for emerging cultural shifts in how language is used. While maintaining professionalism, we wish to support a diversity of stylistic choices, and welcome any questions, comments and feedback about this.

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## Sources

All facts should be sourced from reputable organizations that disclose the origin of the information. Primary sources outside of the major news analysis sites are highly preferred: original research and reporting, government documents, etc.

### Use:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals.
- Government websites.
- News wires.
- Non-partisan think tanks and nonprofits.
- Verbatim transcripts/videos: from government proceedings, news conferences, interviews on news programs, podcasts, etc.

### Avoid:

- Sources with a poor reputation for factuality.
- News analysis and other secondhand coverage based on primary reporting published elsewhere.
- Highly partisan organizations.
- Old/outdated sources and information.
- Paywalled sources.
- Existing fact checks (a sign that the topic is already covered).

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## Approval Checklist

This is your cheat sheet to review before submitting each brief to make sure all the essential criteria are covered.

- ☑ **Claim responsiveness:** Are you responding directly to the flagged claim and addressing its central contention(s)?
- ☑ **Definitive answers:** Are you able to answer your question with a definitive yes/no and support your ruling with facts from publicly accessible sources?
- ☑ **Factual accuracy:** Have you double checked that your key facts accurately reflect the information contained in your sources?
- ☑ **Unbiased communication:** Are you using neutral, informative language that is fair to the parties involved?
- ☑ **Transparent, high-quality sourcing:** Are you using, primary, publicly accessible sources from reputable organizations?



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## FAQs

*Q: How closely should our editors look at fact briefs?*

A: These are your fact briefs. They should be edited with the same intensity as anything else you publish. Gigafact will ensure standards compliance, but you are ultimately responsible for what you publish.

*Q: Which graphics can I use?*

A: Limit graphics to those that provide visual information; avoid uploading solely aesthetic images.

*Q: How do I establish the credibility of a source?*

A: Use media bias rating services, ideally [Ad Fontes Media](#). Other options include [Media Bias/Fact Check](#) and [AllSides](#). Some sources, especially academic journals, will lack a media bias rating. In these cases, research the source and use your judgment.

*Q: Can I cite myself as a source?*

A: If you are citing your own original research, or, say, a quote you obtained, citing yourself is fair game. If you're reporting on research, stats, a quote, etc. done elsewhere, please trace the reporting back to the primary source and use that.

*Q: How heavy is Gigafact's editing process?*

A: Editors will leave your Fact Brief largely as-is, correcting small grammar mistakes if encountered.

*Q: What is the ideal turnaround time for a Fact Brief?*

A: Responsiveness to current issues boosts engagement. Aim to address a relevant topic between a couple hours and a couple days after it emerges in the media.

*Q: What kind of claims should I fact check and how do I find them?*

A: Prioritize current, unsupported claims that are being widely circulated on the internet. A good place to start is to type your state, along with a keyword like “news” or “politics,” in the searchbars of each of the major social media platforms — TikTok, Reddit, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. You can read more about selecting claims [here](#).