

### Ethics and standards still apply

Digital reporting doesn't mean that basic journalistic ethics and standards go out the window. If anything, there may be new ethical considerations you hadn't thought about. Here are a few points and questions to dwell on:

Just as an email is not as good as an interview you did in person, neither is a quote from a post on the internet. Speak to people directly when you can.

Some verification tools take advantage of the way social media platforms obscure privacy settings and lead people to share things they didn't realize were public. Avoid needlessly prying into anyone's private life.

If you are screenshotting and documenting data from social media, understand that real people are implicated in that data. If your systems are not secure and that data falls into other hands, you can inadvertently put people at risk.

If you are going to post anything in closed or anonymous spaces during your verification, are you going to use your real name?

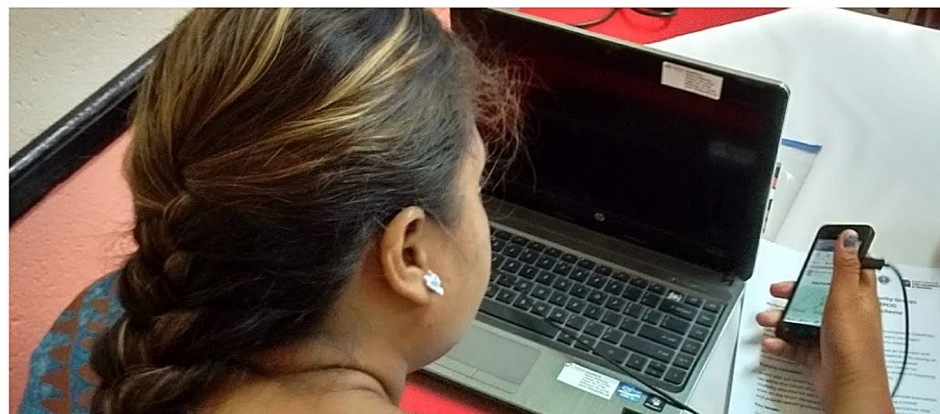
Are you going to be forthright in your purposes for being in those spaces?

For more on ethics and responsible reporting, please see First Draft's Guide to Responsible Reporting in an Age of Information Disorder and the Ethical Considerations chapter of First Draft's Guide to Closed Groups, Messaging Apps & Online Apps.

# GEN-Z Journalism Misinformation Workshop

9am-12pm, Friday 21st October 2021

National University of Samoa,  
Lepapaigalagala Campus, Apia, SAMOA



Supported by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in partnership with the Samoa Alliance of Media Practitioners for Development (SAMPOD) and the National University of Samoa (NUS), Faculty of Arts, Dept. of Media & Communications.

Resource Material available from ;

<https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/newsgathering-and-monitoring-on-the-social-web/>

## Absolute essentials

Before verifying any content online, ask yourself this most basic question: Is the content I am looking at connected to an event that actually took place?

In some circumstances, such as a breaking news event, this question might be the very thing you are trying to ascertain with your verification. But in some cases it isn't.

Imagine you find a video that claims to be of long lines and unhappy passengers at Chicago O'Hare International Airport. Before you go down the rabbit hole of verifying the person who captured the video, the date and time, or the location, your first question should be this one: Are there actually reports of problems at the airport?

Another example is the infamous headline that emerged ahead of the 2016 US election: Pope Endorses Donald Trump. You can do

all the verification you like about the website, who created it, when the article was published and how far it spread, etc. but the fundamental claim of the article should be the first thing you check.



There are many safety precautions you should take when diving into digital investigations, but especially if you will be spending time in more closed and anonymous spaces, like Discord.

Here are some basics to consider:

Make sure you have high levels of personal digital security. Use a password manager whenever possible.

Examine your own digital footprint and the privacy settings on all your social accounts. How much could someone find out about you, your family and friends via your accounts?

Consider using a VPN and an anonymous web browser like Tor. If you participate or interact with people in closed and anonymous spaces, be careful about the amount of personal information you divulge.

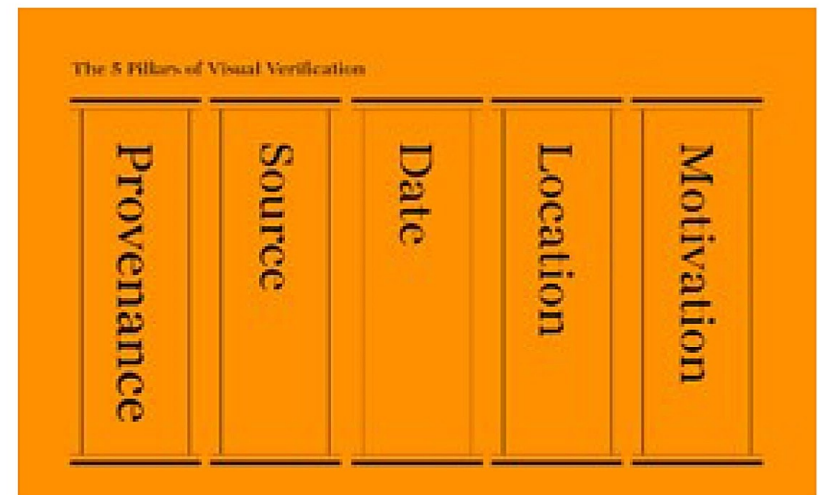


Monitor for related content simultaneously. While you are verifying a piece of content, it can be helpful to have a monitoring dashboard and alerts system set up so that you can see similar content if it surfaces. You can use keywords and language from the content you are examining to set up a search column in TweetDeck, for example, or set up a list of accounts that often engage with your source.

For more information about how to monitor social media effectively, see First Draft's Essential Guide to Newsgathering and Monitoring on the Social Web.

### Stay updated

Verification is constantly changing. Tech platforms modify their privacy settings, research tools get taken down and new ones are built. If you want to keep up, you should regularly update your toolbox or read up on the latest techniques from the verification and open source intelligence (OSINT) community. There are many public OSINT/verification lists on Twitter that you can follow to do this. See *First Draft's Essential Guide on Newsgathering and Monitoring* for more information on finding and making lists.



The nice thing about teaching verification is that it is easy to break down. That's because whether you are looking at an eyewitness video, a manipulated photo, a sock puppet account or a meme, the basic checks you have to do are the same:

**Provenance:** Are you looking at the original account, article or piece of content?

**Source:** Who created the account or article, or captured the original piece of content?

**Date:** When was it created?

**Location:** Where was the account established, website created or piece of content captured?

**Motivation:** Why was the account established, website created or the piece of content captured?

The more you know about each pillar, the stronger your verification will be.

Beware the rabbit hole. Often verification takes minutes. Other times it can lead you down a fruitless path of obsession. Learn to figure out when it makes more sense to give up. Also, be aware that developing too much of an attachment to one hypothesis about where a piece of content came from or whether it is true can not only compromise the integrity of your verification, but also be a big time suck.

We are human and it is easy to have a gut reaction to whether a piece of content is true or false. But we have to remain skeptical at all times.

Remember the old editor's adage: even if your mom says she loves you, check it out.

The internet is an expansive and cavernous place. If you are looking too intently for a particular piece of evidence, you may miss conflicting evidence along the way.

### Document it

Screenshot everything! Content can quickly be deleted or taken down by the host platform. You might be surprised how quickly you can lose crucial pieces of information. It is also important for the transparency of your verification.

There are a lot of impressive tools out there for verification, and we talk about many of them in this guide. But remember that sometimes a simple Google search will do the trick.

### Don't forget to pick up your phone

In many situations, the best-case scenario is that you find a phone number or email address for a source so that you can contact them directly and ask about the content they shared. Even sending a simple direct message can start a conversation in private, where you can find out so much more than you otherwise would.

### Set up a toolbox

If you are going to be doing a lot of verification or other kinds of digital research, it is worth setting up a bookmarking system that lays out all of your favorite sites. As mentioned previously, one of the biggest challenges can be just remembering the tools at your disposal.

Bookmark folders in a web browser are good, but our favorite way of saving verification tools is with a Start.me page. It displays all of your bookmarks nicely and lets you quickly set up and continuously add new resources. You can use it as your homepage or bookmark it somewhere else.