Quote Verifiability

Instructions •

Overview

Journalists quote people in articles, either directly (verbatim) or by paraphrasing. In doing so, they strive for accuracy and transparency. But time pressure, and the desire of some sources to remain anonymous, can lead to compromise. This can make it harder for readers to evaluate the story.

In this task, we investigate the **verifiability** of quotes. A quote is verifiable if it is relatively easy to check its accuracy. You will be asked to give your own judgments about which quotes are more verifiable.

> **What is quote verifiability?**
>
> To judge verifiability, ask yourself this question:
>
> "Assuming the quote were fabricated, how easy would it be to prove it?"
>
> The easier it would be to prove it, the more verifiable the quote is.

A day at the editor's desk...

To get in the mindset, imagine you're an editor for a newspaper, and your job is to investigate dubious quotes. It's your job to find out — and prove — which quotes were fabricated. Like the journalists, you can talk to politicians, or get access to special reports, statistics and legislation, etc., in order to verify the quotes.

But, assume you can't consult the journalist — they don't know they're under investigation! This means that if the quote is vague, then proving it was fabricated might be more difficult.

With this scenario in mind, ask yourself: "If these quotes were in fact made up, how hard would it be for me to check and find out?" In other words **how verifiable are they?**

What makes a quote verifiable?

A lot of factors can affect whether a quote is verifiable. If the journalist only offered a vague interpretation of what was said, it could be difficult to verify. If the journalist doesn't provide much information about the source, you might need to speak to a lot of people to check it. **But, there are no hard rules for judging verifiability**.

Even a quote without a source might be highly verifiable if it could be checked with a simple search.

Let's see some examples:

Examples

Each quote below paints a similar picture. But notice, as we go down the list, how the quotes become harder and harder to verify. They start out **verifiable**, and then gradually become **unverifiable**:

1. In a press release today, Mr. A, leader of the XYZ party, said: "We don't plan to let that bill pass any time soon".

   > Pretty verifiable right? We just need to look at the press release that Mr. A gave on that day, and see if he said exactly those words. No problem!

2. In a press release today, Mr. A hinted that members of the XYZ party wouldn't let the bill pass any time soon.

   > A bit less verifiable — we'd need to watch the press release closely to see if he said anything that might count as "hinting" that the members wouldn't let the bill pass. It's not as easy as checking the verbatim quote in (1), so it's a bit less verifiable.

3. Members of the XYZ party said that they "wouldn't let that bill pass any time soon" and would "do what it takes to make sure it isn't brought forward again."

   > Like (2), this is a bit less verifiable than (1). We can't just watch Mr. A's press release, we'd need to speak to many members of the XYZ party. So it's also less verifiable than (1).

4. Some members of the XYZ party say they won't let that bill pass any time soon.

   > This is even less verifiable than (3) because we aren't working with a direct quote. And "some" might mean as few as two, so we might need to talk to all the XYZ party members.

5. Members of the XYZ party showed less enthusiasm for the bill.

   > Uh-oh! Very tough to verify! Even if we spoke to every member of XYZ party, it would be relatively tough to judge whether they showed "less enthusiasm". This is pretty unverifiable!

6. It is believed that members of the XYZ party are less than enthusiastic about the bill.

   > Now this is downright unverifiable! There isn't even a source (who is it that "believes" this), so where do we start? Besides, what does it mean to be "less than enthusiastic"? this is probably about as unverifiable as they come!

* Bonuses for good judgment *

We are rewarding good, careful judgment — whenever your answer matches the majority, we'll double your payment for that question! Choose carefully! Bonuses will be issued once the job completes, which we expect to be within 5 days of you doing your work.

Closeup on quotes

We've highlighted different parts of the quotes so you know exactly what you're supposed judge. Here's an example:

"source" "content"

He said *the U.S. will default on Nov. 9 if Congress does n't act by then .*

"trigger"

Using your judgment

Judging verifiability can be difficult. If you really can't decide, then go with your gut! We do include test questions, so stay vigilant! But we try to be fair by using examples most people paying close attention would get right.

Imagine you are an editor tasked with verifying dubious quotes, and that you've got access to pundits, politicians, special reports, statistics and legislation, etc. Which quote is the easiest verify?

In other words, **which quote is more verifiable?**

More Verifiable

- ⊙ The paper accused him of being a leading proponent of `` peaceful evolution, `` a catch phrase to describe what **China believes** *is the policy of Western countries to seduce socialist nations into the capitalist sphere* .
- ⊙ **The companies** said *they expect the transaction to be completed by Dec. 15* .

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- ⊙ This compares with estimates *that the U.S. `` derivatives '' market is perhaps four times as large as the underlying domestic market* .
- ⊙ *After the study , the SEC would be willing to consider adding new circuit breakers or fine-tuning the current ones* . **Exchange Commission Chairman Richard Breeden** added .

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- ⊙ **Such a proposal** values Jaguar *at more than # 1.6 billion ($ 2.53 billion)* .
- ⊙ **Stephen Boesel , president of T. Rowe Price Growth and Income Fund** , explains *that companies raise their payouts most robustly only after the economy and corporate profits have been growing for some time* .

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- ⊙ **Government officials** said *exports at the end of the year would remain under a government target of $ 68 billion* .
- ⊙ *`` The dollar has n't reacted much to it , so gold has n't either* , **``Dinsa Mehta** said .

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- ⊙ **The National Association of Securities Dealers , the self-regulatory organization for the over-the-counter securities markets** , disciplined *a number of firms and individuals for alleged violations of industry rules* .
- ⊙ Although it is not the first company to produce the thinner drives , which store information in personal computers , **MiniScribe** says *it is the first with an 80-megabyte drive* ; the company plans to introduce a 120-megabyte drive next year .

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- ⊙ *That should happen by today* , **Charles Daggs** said .
- ⊙ *`` There 's no question that some of those workers and managers contracted asbestos-related diseases. ''* said **Darrell Phillips , vice president of human resources for Hollingsworth & Vose** . *`` But you have to recognize that these events took place 35 years ago . It has no bearing on our work force today* .

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- ⊙ **The company** attributed the earnings drop *to lower volume related to seasonal demand and the soft consumer durable market , especially in the automotive sector* .
- ⊙ **Temple** , however , harshly criticized Sea Containers ' plan yesterday , characterizing it as a `` *highly conditional device designed to entrench management , confuse shareholders and prevent them from accepting our superior cash offer .* ''

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- ⊙ **Mr. Nemeth** said in parliament *that Czechoslovakia and Hungary would suffer environmental damage if the twin dams were built as planned* .
- ⊙ Among other things , **Mr. Bologna** said *that the sale will facilitate Gen-Probe 's marketing of a diagnostic test for acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS* .

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- ⊙ *`` No one wants the U.S. to pick up its marbles and go home* , **``Mr. Hormats** says .
- ⊙ Meantime , **regulators** are becoming increasingly worried *as the rush to leverage shows no signs of abating* .

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- ⊙ *`` We would have to wait until we have collected on those assets before we can move forward* , **``David Cooke** said .
- ⊙ **Interpublic Group** said *that volume makes it the largest supplier of original TV programming in Europe* .

Test Validators