

Fact Checking Made Easy

Lesson 8: Now You Try It #1

Let's see how well you do fact checking a short paragraph that might have appeared on a parenting blog where a mother is arguing in favor of keeping music education in the schools. She recounts several experiences, including this one:

I wish every schoolkid could have an experience like we had on Thursday, December 10, 2013 at the North Bridge Mall. Who should be giving a surprise concert in the Food Court but world-famous cellist Yoyo Ma along with a couple dozen fellow woodwind players from the Chicago Philharmonic. My five-year-old son Marc stood there alongside me with his eyes wide, and afterwards begged me for cello lessons.

Please download the PDF called Lesson 8 Exercise and pause the video here. Identify each item in the paragraph that needs to be fact checked, actually perform the fact checking to either verify each item or correct it, then come back to the video and I'll go through the exercise with you.

[Pause]

Did you do the fact checking exercise about the surprise concert at the North Bridge Mall? If, not please stop the video and do it now. You should have found and corrected five errors in that paragraph, and I'll go through the process with you now.

The first thing to check is "Thursday, December 10, 2013." Was December 10 indeed a Thursday? You can check this in 20 seconds online by typing "December 2013 calendar" into Google and clicking on any of the images that come up. See? December 10 was a Tuesday. That's error #1.

Next, let's see if we can find a news article about this concert. This won't always be possible, but because Yo-yo Ma is one of the most famous classical musicians in the world, and he normally doesn't play in Food Courts, it's quite likely that a Chicago-area media outlet covered the event. You can indeed pull up an article from *Huffington Post* about the concert by typing "Yoyo Ma Chicago mall concert December 2013" into Google.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/11/yo-yo-ma-pop-up_n_4426124.html

Now before we look at the *Huffington Post* piece, I want to show you something interesting on the Google search page. We see Yo-yo Ma's name spelled three different ways. Poor guy! Yoyo, with no space or hyphen, Yo-yo with a hyphen but no space and Yo Yo as two separate words, with no space. Which one is correct? Never, never should you simply go with the most common option, the one you see most often in a search like this. Instead, you have to look for an authoritative source.

Who can be trusted? Yo-yo Ma is so famous I'm not sure he would have his own website, but actually he does. Here we are at the official Yo-yo Ma website, and you can see the correct spelling of his name (with a hyphen). In addition, this is the sort of thing that wouldn't last five minutes on Wikipedia with an error, so we can also look it up there. Same result, thank goodness. So the spelling of Yo-yo Ma's name is error #2.

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Now let's look at the *Huffington Post* article. Was the concert at the North Bridge mall? The article says the concert took place at The Shops at North Bridge. Quite likely that's the official name for what the locals call, informally, the North Bridge mall. On your blog or in a book, you should call things by their correct names. Look what happens when you plunk "North Bridge mall" into Google. The first result that comes up is for The Shops at North Bridge. This pretty much rules out the possibility that there is a mall in the Chicago area officially called "North Bridge mall." Note that it's North Bridge, two words, not Northbridge. The name of the mall is error #3.

Did the concert take place in the Food Court? This I am not sure about. The video accompanying the *Huffington Post* article doesn't swing around to show the audience. That might be incorrect, but I can't say so for sure.

Is Yo-Yo Ma a cellist? Yes, you can confirm this at his official website and on Wikipedia.

Did he play with the Chicago Philharmonic, as our blogger claimed? The *Huffington Post* says it was the Chicago Civic Orchestra. However, an entry on Google refers to the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. What is the correct name of this musical organization? Let's look for the official website of this organization - and guess what, *Huffington Post* got it wrong. It's the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. With the actual name of the orchestra, we've now identified error #4.

I skipped over another matter that needs to be checked, and maybe you missed it also. The blog post said, "Yoyo Ma along with a couple dozen fellow woodwind players." This is easy to gloss over, especially if you are not a music aficionado, because cellos are made of wood. However, is a cello a woodwind instrument? Definitely not. Any online dictionary will settle that for you. Dictionary.com defines "woodwind" as "a musical wind instrument of the group comprising the flutes, clarinets, oboes, bassoons, and occasionally, the saxophones." Oops! No cellos or violins included.

A visual route to checking this out is going to Google and typing "woodwind instruments" in as an image search, and you'll see that nothing like what Yo-Yo Ma is playing comes up in the pictures. So identifying the cello as a woodwind instrument is error #5.

How did you do? Try to summarize anything you missed in this exercise so you won't make that mistake again in your next try.