

**NEWS ONLINE GUIDANCE  
– RELEVANT EXCERPTS ONLY**

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Editor, BBC News website  
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## (12): SOURCES

You'll be using a wide variety of news sources, including BBC material and correspondents, international agencies, websites, blogs and interviews with prominent figures and readers. The use of agencies, especially on breaking news, requires great care. A report from a single agency can only be used with great care and with clear attribution. A summary of the guidelines follows here.

### **International**

Typically, the sources would be the main wire services, news copy from a BBC correspondent or stringer, or, in some circumstances, a write-up of a radio or television report supplied by the BBC's monitoring service at Caversham.

BBC correspondents are taken to be reliable as a single source. The same can be said of an AP report on a White House statement.

Editors should acquire the expertise to make more sophisticated judgements. These might be based on the knowledge that a particular Reuters correspondent is also the trusted BBC stringer, or conversely on a warning from a BBC correspondent about the unreliability of a local wire reporter. It is worth consulting the relevant regional desk, which is likely to have this kind of detailed knowledge.

For breaking news, a single source may be enough so long as there is clear attribution - a word like "reportedly" does NOT do the job - and the story makes clear there is no confirmation.

Some official and semi-official sources like the Chinese Xinhua and Turkish Anatolia news agencies carry quite a high credibility rating, others less so. When in doubt, refer up.

It is also important to consider whether a source has a specific agenda or reason to be partial. When there is, that should be taken into account and made clear. A phrase like "...which normally reflects the official view" may be helpful. And it is worth spelling out that there is no independent confirmation.

In some circumstances, such as natural disasters or bomb explosions, the picture will be partial, or confused. This need not be a problem so long as we acknowledge the fact and attribute carefully. We should be clear about what we do not know as well as what we do. By all means say "details are sketchy" - such phrases can add to the drama of a breaking news story, as well as honestly reflecting the limits of our knowledge.

If there is any doubt about whether the BBC is going with a story, the World News Orgs on the second floor are a good point of contact. They will be close to correspondents trying to stand up the story.

Particular care needs to be taken with other websites. During the conflict in Iraq, Arabic websites published accounts and video clips which were sourced to militant groups. It can be very difficult, if not impossible, to check these original sources, so we must make an attribution.

Do NOT copy and paste news agency material.

## UK

Again, most of the time we proceed with stories that have been confirmed using BBC material or our own checks. We can also proceed with a news story on the basis of facts from the Press Association (PA) only.

With breaking UK political news or Northern Ireland stories we should take guidance from the politics team at Millbank or the Belfast office. A story which PA attributes to "sources" and not to a clearly identified organisation or individual, and which is not supported by quotes, also needs to be treated with caution.

PA (and other agencies) often give numbers for people attending controversial events or rallies. When these are challenged, as they sometimes are by our readers, it is very difficult for us to stand by figures like this because we were not present. We should avoid using agency estimates of crowds and in general we should only attribute such numbers to the police and the organisers. We should use both where we can.

*eg. "The Stop the War Coalition say 15,000 people attended the rally in Trafalgar Square, while police say they believe the number taking part was about 7,000."*

With any queries, the UK news organiser can be called to get a sense of how the rest of the BBC is treating a story. It is also important to make clear that agency copy CANNOT be copied – so you must not cut and paste.

## Sourcing pictures

Sourcing of pictures is just as important as sourcing of text. We must be sure of the origins and authenticity of our pictures and be aware that attempts are made to dupe us.

Pictures can be hard to verify, so the risk of being misled is greater.

When the source of a picture is unclear, it should be treated with caution. If in doubt, do not use it - and refer up. There may be occasions when we will want to use a picture of doubtful origin, in which case we should be careful to use a phrase such as "The picture broadcast by ...apparently showing".

Most of our pictures are taken from PA, AP, Getty and AFP wire services. Where appropriate these should routinely carry an identification tag (except on indexes). When we use other pictures - screen-grabs for instance - their source should be identified in the alt tag. When it is an archive picture, this should also be made clear and great care should be taken with the caption.

Pictures should not be lifted from other web sites or social networking sites without permission.

Pictures sent in by readers are normally verified by the Have Your Say team.