

# NewsGuard

## GUIDE FOR STUDENTS USING NEWSGUARD

### What is NewsGuard?

NewsGuard helps people build media literacy skills, avoid misinformation, and conduct online research with confidence. NewsGuard’s trained journalists rate and review thousands of news and information websites to help users know which sites they can generally trust – and which might be trying to deceive them. These ratings can be accessed from NewsGuard’s desktop browser extension or mobile apps.

### How does NewsGuard review websites?

Each site is rated using nine standards of credibility and transparency. Based on how the site fares on the nine criteria, it receives a score out of 100, which corresponds to an overall Red rating (for sites receiving fewer than 60 points) or Green rating (for sites receiving 60 or more). Each site also receives a full “Nutrition Label” review that explains each rating and discusses the site’s ownership, financing, content, credibility, transparency, and history. Read a Nutrition Label and you can see exactly how and why NewsGuard rated a site the way it did.

### When and how should I use NewsGuard?

NewsGuard’s ratings can be helpful any time you are browsing online, but they are particularly useful for...

- Scrolling through social media (like Twitter and Facebook)
- Using a search engine (like Google or Bing)
- Conducting online research for a paper or project

These ratings and Nutrition Label reviews can help you understand whether a site is highly trustworthy, whether it has some issues, or whether it is completely unreliable. But ultimately, you should always assess each site for yourself, thinking critically about how much to trust it.

### NEWSGUARD’S CRITERIA

#### CREDIBILITY

- ✓ Does not repeatedly publish false content
- ✓ Gathers and presents information responsibly
- ✓ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors
- ✓ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly
- ✓ Avoids deceptive headlines

#### TRANSPARENCY

- ✓ Discloses ownership and financing
- ✓ Clearly labels advertising
- ✓ Reveals who’s in charge, including possible conflicts of interest
- ✓ Provides the names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information

### GREEN AND RED RATINGS



This website generally adheres to basic standards of credibility and transparency



This website generally fails to adhere to basic standards of credibility and transparency

# THE BROWSER EXTENSION

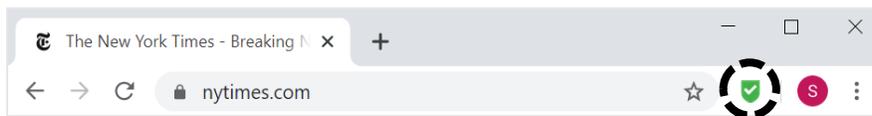
## Installing the NewsGuard browser extension

Install the extension for Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or Safari by following the link for your browser:

- Google Chrome: <http://bit.ly/2mMUEKj>
- Microsoft Edge: <http://bit.ly/2N0ASX6>
- Mozilla Firefox: <http://mzl.la/2x4rE5w>
- Apple Safari: <https://apple.co/2pPR8jJ>

## Using the Extension: What you will see

Once you install NewsGuard's browser extension, NewsGuard rating icons will begin to appear next to links on search engines and social media feeds, including Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Bing. Ratings also appear in the upper-right corner of websites rated by NewsGuard, next to the URL bar.



## Using the extension: Interacting with the extension

1. NewsGuard ratings will appear next to website links on social media or search results.
2. Hover over each icon to see a brief description of the site and why it received its rating.
3. To see the full rating of each website, click, "See the full Nutrition Label." Each Nutrition Label describes the website's background, ownership, and why it received its rating—including its performance on each of the nine criteria:

**HOVER OVER THE ICONS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH SITE**



**mayoclinic.org** NewsGuard

This website generally maintains basic standards of credibility and transparency.

A health information site run by the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, with medical content that is reviewed by physicians. It publishes highly reliable content, although its transparency standards are weak.

[See the full Nutrition Label →](#)

CREDIBILITY	TRANSPARENCY
Does not repeatedly publish false content	Website discloses ownership and financing
Gathers and presents information responsibly	Clearly labels advertising
Regularly corrects or clarifies errors	Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest
Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly	The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information
Avoids deceptive headlines	

**CLICK TO READ THE SITE'S FULL NUTRITION LABEL REVIEW**

**mayoclinic.org**

A health information site run by the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, with medical content that is reviewed by physicians. It publishes highly reliable content, although its transparency standards are weak.

**Ownership and Financing** The site is owned by the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, a nonprofit organization that handles the educational and research materials published by the Mayo Clinic. The Mayo Clinic encompasses hospital campuses in Rochester, Minnesota, Phoenix, Arizona, and Jacksonville, Florida, along with a network of physician practices and specialists in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. The site carries advertisements and sponsored content. It also solicits donations.

**Content** MayoClinic.org provides alphabetized articles on health conditions, diseases, medications, and medical procedures designed for a general audience. Articles are often spread out over multiple pages. For example, the article on brain tumors has separate pages for symptoms and causes of the disease, diagnosis, and treatment. Mayo Clinic doctors and departments specializing in brain tumors, and an overview of brain tumor care at Mayo Clinic.

What part of the article readers see first depends on how they access the site. If clicking a link to an article through the alphabetized lists, an overview of the subject will pop up first. If readers select a topic from the Featured Topics section of the home page, the first page they see is the one promoting Mayo Clinic's expertise and skill in that particular area.

Along with the articles, MayoClinic.org provides information about its hospitals, medical schools, laboratories, and clinical trials.

# THE ICONS

## UNDERSTANDING THE TWO MAIN NEWSGUARD ICONS:

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Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

A site with a **red** badge lacks credibility or transparency in important areas and should generally not be trusted as the primary source of information. Users should always independently verify information on **red** sites, and if they feel there is a compelling case for citing a **red** site, they should be able to clearly articulate why.



This website generally maintains basic standards of credibility and transparency.

A site with a **green** badge can generally be trusted, but not all sites rated **green** are equal. A **green** site may still lack credibility or transparency in certain key areas. Users should read the full Nutrition Label to understand any shortcomings of the site that might impact whether they should trust its information.

## ADDITIONAL ICONS:

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This is a satire or humor website. It is not an actual news source.

A website intended to entertain. Unlike a false news website that is intentionally deceiving, a satirical website is upfront about its nature, or widely known to be a parody. A common example is The Onion. Much like a **red** website, an **orange** website should typically not be consulted as the primary source of information, unless there is a compelling reason for citing it.



This website is a platform that publishes content from its users that it does not vet. Information from this source may not be reliable.

A platform, such as Wikipedia or YouTube, where users produce content that might not be edited or vetted for accuracy. Readers should independently verify information on the platform using reputable sources.



This website is still in the process of being rated by NewsGuard.

Stay tuned: NewsGuard's team of journalists is currently in the process of reviewing this website.



(or no badge displayed)

When a white badge appears next to the URL bar of a website, or no badge appears next to a link on social media or in search results, it indicates that NewsGuard has not rated the site and does not plan to rate it soon. This does not mean that it isn't a reliable source; it likely means that the website is not a typical news website, or that it does not have a large enough reach for NewsGuard to consider rating it.

# THE NINE CRITERIA

## CREDIBILITY

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- False Content:** **Does the site repeatedly publish false content?** While many websites occasionally make mistakes, sites that do not promptly correct those errors may be trying to misinform readers. False stories can range from political conspiracy theories to health myths.
- Gathering & Presenting:** **Does the site gather and present information responsibly?** *Gathering* information responsibly involves referencing multiple sources, preferably those that present firsthand information on a subject. *Presenting* information responsibly means providing a balanced, fair account of events – not misstating facts, misquoting sources, or distorting information by only including certain facts while leaving out other key details.
- Corrections:** **Does the site regularly correct errors?** Even the most reliable news organizations sometimes make mistakes, but credible news outlets should have a policy for routinely correcting their errors and transparently communicating those corrections to readers – such as by adding a “correction” notice or “editor’s note” to stories.
- News vs. Opinion:** **Does the site handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly?** Some websites only publish opinion stories, and others only publish news reports, but many sites publish a mixture of both. Credible news outlets should make it clear to their readers which stories contain commentary – such as by labeling them “opinion” or publishing them in an opinion section. If a website approaches its reporting from a certain point of view, it should clearly disclose its perspective to readers.
- Deceptive Headlines:** **Does the site avoid publishing deceptive headlines?** A headline tells a reader what is in the story before he or she decides to read it. Some websites use exaggerated headlines that distort the facts in a story to entice people into clicking and reading an article. Deceptive headlines are dangerous because people may only skim headlines they encounter online, and not take the time to read the articles.

## TRANSPARENCY

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- Ownership & Financing:** **Does the site disclose its ownership and financing?** News organizations may be owned by an individual, a private company, a nonprofit organization, or a government. Transparent sites should clearly tell readers who owns the site and where its money is coming from – especially if the owners or funders have political or ideological motivations.
- Advertising:** **Does the site clearly label advertising?** Sometimes companies will pay to have articles written about them or pay to run ads that look like stories. Transparent sites should make it clear to the reader what content is paid for, and what is independent editorial content.
- Who’s in Charge:** **Does the site reveal who’s in charge?** Sites should clearly identify those in charge of making decisions about reporting and coverage – such as their editor(s) or publisher(s) – so that they can be held accountable for content on their site.
- Content Creators:** **Does the site identify its content creators?** Stories should be attributed to an author, using their real name. The site should also provide contact information for its content creators, so readers can ask questions and make complaints, and bios revealing their backgrounds and any conflicts of interest with what they report.

# THE NUTRITION LABELS

## HOW TO READ A NUTRITION LABEL

The site's name and a one or two sentence overview.

Identifies who owns a site and how it makes money.

Describes the type of stories, videos, and other information on the site. Also explains if the site reflects an ideology.

Explains the site's reporting practices, describing why NewsGuard passed or failed the site on each of the five credibility

Explains the site's transparency practices, describing why NewsGuard passed or failed the site on each of the four transparency criteria.

Provides context for how long a website has been around, why it was started, how it has changed over time.

Names the NewsGuard journalists who reviewed this site, linking to their bios and contact info. Also provides a link for feedback on the review.

A list of source links, organized by section, to support each fact stated in the review.

### abc7chicago.com

The website for WLS-TV, the ABC affiliate covering Chicago and its suburbs. The station is also known as ABC7.

#### Ownership & Financing:

WLS is owned by the television stations group of ABC, a subsidiary of Walt Disney Co. ABC owns and operates seven other television stations across the U.S. and provides national news and entertainment programming through separate divisions.

The station and website generate revenue through advertising.

#### Content

The website covers Chicago-area news, sports, politics, health, weather, and traffic. ABC7Chicago.com also features content from an investigative reporting team, a special section covering stories relating to disabled people, and "Hungry Hound," covering the city's food scene. Typical headlines on the site include "Chicago police officer found guilty of murder in off-duty shooting death of Jose Nieves", "Siblings Illustrate Book to Raise Awareness of Congenital Heart Defects", and "Local officials break ground on new Union Station tower".

Original ABC7 articles cover local news, while national and global stories come from wire services such as The Associated Press, and other ABC network affiliates. Other articles are produced by Hoodline, a content provider that creates "automated local stories" based on data provided by consumer reviews of restaurants, rental property listings and other public comment platforms.

#### Credibility

Articles on ABC7 are usually based on firsthand reporting by the station's journalists, or from content providers such as The Associated Press. Local reporting features statements from witnesses, law enforcement agencies or other documents. Headlines match the content of stories.

The website does not have an opinion section and does not regularly publish commentary or opinion articles.

The site posts corrections to articles, which appear at the bottom of articles as either a "correction" or an "editor's note", explaining what was changed. The site does not publish a corrections policy.

#### Transparency

ABC7 states that its station was sold to Disney in the site's history section. Stories on the website that directly refer to Disney disclose that Disney owns the station.

However, the website does not prominently display its affiliation with the Walt Disney Co. on its regular pages or at the bottom of its website, which does not meet NewsGuard's standards for disclosing ownership in a user-friendly manner.

The website provides names, biographies and contact details for the station's on-air journalists, but does not provide similar details for other local journalists. The website's editorial leadership is also not identified on the site's team or contact pages. Local stories list the name of the on-air journalist that reported the story, or an ABC7 badge for other locally produced stories.

The station did not respond to a NewsGuard telephone call and four emails in 2019 seeking comment on the station's disclosure of ownership, top editors, and content creators.

Advertisements and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

#### History

ABC7 traces its origin to W9XBK, a TV station founded in 1939. The station changed its call letters to WLS-TV in 1968. Oprah Winfrey got her start at the station after taking over the morning show, "AM Chicago," in 1984. The Walt Disney Company purchased ABC in 1996.

*Correction: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label erroneously described WLS/ABC7 as a TV "network" and not a "station".*

*Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on Dec. 24, 2019, to reflect that abc7chicago.com now meets NewsGuard's standard for regularly publishing corrections.*

*This Nutrition Label was updated in March 2019 to reflect NewsGuard's determination that ABC7Chicago.com does not meet its standard for revealing ownership in a user-friendly manner, or for providing information about content creators.*

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

#### Sources

**Ownership and Financing**

- <https://mediakit.go.com/abc-0tv/>
- <https://publicfiles.fcc.gov/bv-profile/wls-tv>
- <https://abc7chicago.com/about/>
- <https://abc7chicago.com/contact-abc7-chicago/37885/>
- <https://abc7chicago.com/uncategorized/about-abc-7-chicago/54807/>

**Content**

- <http://abc7chicago.com/i-team/>
- <http://abc7chicago.com/hungryhound/>
- <http://abc7chicago.com/community/>
- <http://abc7chicago.com/disabilityissues/>

**Criteria Checklist:**

This website mostly adheres to basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 82.5/100

- Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)
- Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance. [More information.](#)

The criteria checklist, showing how a site fared on NewsGuard's nine criteria, its resulting score out of 100, and the overall rating it received (Red or Green).