# TREC 2025 DRAGUN Track Assessment Guidelines

Version 0.3, June 29
Track Organizers: Dake Zhang, Mark Smucker, Charles Clarke
Website: TREC 2025 DRAGUN Track Guidelines

## I. Overview

The **TREC 2025 DRAGUN Track** is designed to support readers in assessing the trustworthiness of online news articles. In this track, participants work on two tasks:

- ★ **Task 1: Question Generation.** Participants identify critical questions that a reader should consider when evaluating a news article's trustworthiness.
- ★ **Task 2: Report Generation.** Participants create a well-attributed, comprehensive report that provides relevant background and context, helping a reader make an informed judgment about the article's credibility. A good Task 2 report should address the important questions from Task 1.

As an **assessor**, your role centers on Task 2. You will **evaluate the participants' reports** to judge how well they help readers assess an article's trustworthiness. This involves two main responsibilities:

1. **Rubric Creation (Article Research & Criteria Development)**: For each assigned news article, you will conduct your own fact-checking and research on the article. Based on this investigation, you will develop a **rubric** – essentially **a set of key questions** or criteria that a high-quality report should address. Each question in your rubric will be accompanied by an expected answer (an **answer nugget**) with **supporting references**. This rubric represents the standard against which participant reports will be evaluated.
2. **Report Evaluation**: After participants submit their reports, you will use your rubric to evaluate how well each report covers the necessary information. In practice, you will check each report to see which of your rubric questions are answered by the report's content (and whether the report provides evidence with citations for those answers). The assigned primary assessor will perform this evaluation for each report, as described later in these guidelines.

**Neutral Point of View**: *It is important to approach the assessment neutrally. Unlike traditional fact-checking that might conclude an article is simply "true" or "false", the DRAGUN track aims to help readers form their own judgments. Your rubric and evaluations should provide multi-source context from a neutral perspective, rather than asserting an "absolute truth". You are not expected to explicitly label an article as trustworthy or not; instead, you identify what information a well-rounded report should include for the reader's benefit.*

## II. Example: A News Article and Its Rubric

To understand the expected output of the assessor's first task, consider the following example. Suppose you are given a news article titled "*Wildfire apocalypse, not as usual, the media's knee-jerk take on the Canadian wildfires was all wrong*" (an opinion piece by Steve Milloy, published June 12, 2023, in *The Spectator*). The article argues that media reports falsely blamed the Canadian wildfires on climate change.

---

**Article URL**: https://thespectator.com/topic/wildfire-apocalypse-canada-climate-change/

# Wildfire apocalypse, not

*As usual, the media's knee-jerk take on the Canadian wildfires was all wrong*

June 12, 2023 | 11:22 am
Written By: Steve Milloy

There was nothing new about springtime wildfires in Canada until the wind shifted unexpectedly last week. That shift blew smoky air all over the northern and eastern US, producing memorably apocalyptic-like orange air in New York City.

Not wanting to waste a crisis, the lamestream media jumped right in with both feet. They blamed the wildfires on the much-dreaded "climate change," scared the daylights out of everyone about the air quality and then warned that more like it was on the way unless we changed our fossil fuel-burning ways.

Not unexpectedly, the media's knee-jerk take was all wrong.

Wildfires and smoky air have always occurred wherever there are forests. At least eighteen of these dark or "yellow days" occurred in the US and Canada from 1706 to 1910. George Washington even noted in his diary the one that occurred on May 19, 1780 that reached as far south as Morristown, New Jersey.

Contrary to the climate narrative, however, the good news is that the number of wildfires and acreage burned has dramatically declined everywhere.

Canadian government data show that wildfires in Canada have been overall declining since 1980. That trend of is the opposite of the trend of increasing emissions and average global temperatures.

If "climate change" is taken to mean an upward trend in average global temperature, then it correlates with fewer, not more, wildfires in Canada and everywhere else.

Few Americans would have even heard of the Canadian wildfires had not been for the smoky air casting a pall everywhere, sending air quality indexes skyrocketing and enabling the media to do what it likes best: scaring the hell out of people.

The featured air pollutant in smoky air is something called "fine particulate matter," basically just plain old soot. During the 1990s, the Environmental Protection Agency rebranded and

weaponized soot as something called PM2.5. EPA has since claimed that (1) there is no safe level of PM2.5 that can be inhaled (2) inhaling PM2.5 can kill you within hours of inhalation and that (3) about one-in-five deaths in the US is caused by PM2.5.

Though EPA has spent almost three decades and billions of dollars inventing PM2.5 as essentially the most toxic substance known to man, PM2.5 didn't live up to its EPA billing in New York City last week.

Per EPA's PM2.5 modeling, New York City's death rate should have just about doubled on June 7-8. But not a death occurred that was or could be attributed to the atrocious air.

Even EPA's back-up expectation of an epidemic of asthma failed. While emergency room visits for asthma did uptick on June 7, the uptick was not all that much greater than a similar uptick six weeks before the wind shift to which no one paid any attention.

Though New York City has almost 8.8 million people, 10 percent for whom are reportedly asthmatic, only about 200 more visits than average were made to hospital ERs on June 7-8. Hardly apocalyptic.

Given that asthma can be an anxiety-driven condition and that the media was bent on creating as much anxiety as possible, one might fairly wonder if many-to-all of those "extra" visits were really caused by media scare-mongering. After all, asthma is caused by exposure to an allergen (a protein-containing molecule like pollen), whereas PM2.5/soot is just innocuous carbon particles.

EPA has previously conducted clinical research on people with wood smoke concentrations as high and higher than were experienced in New York City on June 7-8. Those experiments didn't elicit so much as a cough or wheeze from any study subject.

Wildfire haze may be unusual in New York City, but it is not in the Western US and Canada. It has never caused a public health emergency before because it just doesn't.

While reality has greatly disappointed the climate industrial complex, that has not prevented it from hand-wringing about more such events looming in the future.

But wildfires have always happened and will always happen. Same with smoky days. Ask George Washington.

If greens were sincere in their concern about wildfires (versus just pumping climate hysteria), they would call for better forest management practices that make it easier to control wildfires when they start. This means: 1) more wilderness roads to access fires earlier and more directly, 2) more logging and thinning practices to improve forest health and 3) controlled burns where needed.

No one can control the wind for the fires that do occur. But Smokey Bear was on the right track in stating: "Only you can prevent forest fires."

By Steve Milloy

Steve Milloy is a senior legal fellow and the Energy and Environment Legal Institute and the publisher of JunkScience.com. Twitter: @JunkScience.

---

After reading the article and conducting research on its claims, source, and context, an assessor might create a rubric like this (individual assessors produce **unlabeled** questions; labels are added later by the primary assessor):

1. [Have to know] Question 1: What should I know about the publisher of this article, The Spectator?
    - Answer Nugget 1: The Spectator is a politically conservative, right-leaning magazine.
        - Reference 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spectator
        - Reference 2: https://www.allsides.com/news-source/spectator-world-media-bias
        - Reference 3: https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/the-spectator-usa/
2. [Have to know] Question 2: What should I know about the author of this article, Steve Milloy?
    - Answer Nugget 1: He is the “founder and editor of the blog JunkScience.com”.
        - Reference 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Milloy
        - Reference 2: https://junkscience.com/who-is-steve-milloy/
    - Answer Nugget 2: He has “close and long-standing financial ties to oil companies”.
        - Reference 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Milloy
        - Reference 2: https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2005/05/some-it-hot/
    - Answer Nugget 3: He denies the scientific consensus on climate change.
        - Reference 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Milloy
        - Reference 2: https://www.eenews.net/articles/steve-milloy-doesnt-like-climate-bedwetters/
3. [Have to know] Question 3: What is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)?
    - Answer Nugget 1: It is “an independent agency of the United States government tasked with environmental protection matters”.
        - Reference 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Environmental_Protection_Agency
        - Reference 2: https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/our-mission-and-what-we-do
    - Answer Nugget 2: It “conducts environmental assessment, research, and education”.

        - Reference 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Environmental_Protection_Agency
4. [Have to know] Question 4: What is the relationship between wildfires and climate change, according to research studies?
    - Answer Nugget 1: “Research shows that changes in climate create warmer, drier conditions, leading to longer and more active fire seasons.”
        - Reference 1: https://www.noaa.gov/noaa-wildfire/wildfire-climate-connection
        - Reference 2: https://science2017.globalchange.gov/chapter/8/
    - Answer Nugget 2: “Wildfire activity appears strongly associated with warming and earlier spring snowmelt.”
        - Reference 1: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2015.0178
5. [Have to know] Question 5: The article claims that “Canadian government data show that wildfires in Canada have been overall declining since 1980”. Is this claim accurate?
    - Answer Nugget 1: “There are fewer fires, but an increase in area burned and number of people displaced.”
        - Reference 1: https://www.cbc.ca/news/climate/canada-wildfire-data-change-1.6854186
6. [Good to know] Question 6: What is the Energy and Environment Legal Institute, with which Steve Milloy is affiliated?
    - Answer Nugget 1: It is a “right-of-center nonprofit legal advocacy group”.
        - Reference 1: https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/energy-and-environment-legal-institute/
    - Answer Nugget 2: It “opposes environmentalist legislation”.
        - Reference 1: https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/energy-and-environment-legal-institute/
    - Answer Nugget 3: It is one of the groups funded by coal companies.
        - Reference 1: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/13/peabody-energy-coal-mining-climate-change-denial-funding
7. [Good to know] Question 7: What are the known health effects of PM2.5 (fine particulate matter), according to research?
    - Answer Nugget 1: “Breathing in unhealthy levels of PM2.5 can increase the risk of health problems like heart disease, asthma, and low birth weight.”
        - Reference 1: https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/air/pmq_a.htm
    - Answer Nugget 2: “Increased daily mortality is specifically associated with particle mass constituents found in the aerodynamic diameter size range under 2.5 microns.”
        - Reference 1: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8875828/

8. [Good to know] Question 8: Is the number of wildfires declining around the world?
    - Answer Nugget 1: “Extreme wildfires have become more frequent, more intense, and larger.”
        - Reference 1: https://www.wri.org/insights/global-trends-forest-fires
        - Reference 2: https://science.nasa.gov/earth/explore/wildfires-and-climate-change/
    - Answer Nugget 2: “The decline in global average area burned has indeed been misused to support false claims numerous times.”
        - Reference 1: https://royalsociety.org/blog/2020/10/global-trends-wildfire/
9. [Nice to know] Question 9: Are springtime wildfires common in Canada?
    - Answer Nugget 1: In Canada, “most wildfires occur between April and September”.
        - Reference 1: https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/emergencies-and-disasters-in-canada/types-of-emergencies/wildfires/wildfires-information-facts
    - Answer Nugget 2: “A spring wildfire season is common in British Columbia.”
        - Reference 1: https://blog.gov.bc.ca/bcwildfire/spring-2024-seasonal-outlook/
10. [Nice to know] Question 10: What is the relationship between PM2.5 and asthma?
    - Answer Nugget 1: “Long-term exposure to PM2.5 has significant adverse effects on childhood and adult asthma.”
        - Reference 1: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590332224004871
    - Answer Nugget 2: Air pollution, including PM2.5, can cause asthma and other lung diseases.
        - Reference 1: https://aafa.org/asthma/asthma-triggers-causes/air-pollution-smog-asthma/
    - Answer Nugget 3: A study in 2021 “found insufficient evidence to determine the effect of PM2.5 on asthma in the indoor home environment.”
        - Reference 1: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935121009257
    - Answer Nugget 4: A study in 2024 found “positive correlation between PM2.5 concentration and the cumulative incidence of asthma, with a lag of 0–7 days”.
        - Reference 1: https://aaqr.org/articles/aaqr-23-08-oa-0195

**How to read this rubric:** In the above example, the assessor identified ten questions that a thorough report on the article should answer. Each question is labeled by importance:

- **Have to know:** Core, critical questions. Knowing the answer is essential for judging the article’s trustworthiness (it might change a reader’s perception).
- **Good to know:** Important contextual questions. Not absolutely critical, but answering them will increase a reader’s confidence in their judgment.
- **Nice to know:** Background or peripheral questions. These provide helpful context but are not crucial for most readers’ trust decisions.

For each question, the assessor provided **answer nuggets** – concise facts or findings that answer the question – along with **references** (links to sources) supporting each nugget. A participant's report that addresses all the "Have to know" and most "Good to know" questions with credible references would be considered very strong. This example illustrates the format and level of detail expected in the rubrics you will create.

## III. Developing the Rubric for an Article

Your first major task is to investigate your assigned news article and **create a rubric** based on your findings. In essence, you will be performing your own fact-checking research (like writing a mini-report for yourself) and then translating that into a set of Q&A criteria. (There is an optional online self-paced training, in Section V, that gives you hints on what aspects you can investigate for a news article.) Follow these steps to develop your rubric:

1. **Read the Article and Conduct Your Research.** Begin by reading the news article (topic) you've been assigned. During your reading, you are encouraged to conduct web searches using search engines of your preference to help you understand claims or statements, the context in which it was written (date, author, publication), and any references or sources cited in the article itself. **Keep track of your browsing history, either by keeping those tabs open or taking notes.** This investigative stage is crucial – you are essentially gathering the information that a well-informed reader should know before trusting the article. Key things to research include:
    a. **Reputation and bias** of the publisher (e.g., what do we know about the website or outlet?).
    b. **Background** of the author (expertise, affiliations, any potential agenda).
    c. **Veracity of key claims or statistics** in the article (checking if they are supported or refuted by reliable data).
    d. **Broader context**: For example, if the article is about a scientific topic or an event, find what scientific research or authoritative reports say about it.
2. **Identify the Key Issues and Questions.** Based on your research, determine what questions a comprehensive report should answer to cover all the important aspects of the article's trustworthiness. Think about it this way: after doing your research, you now know a lot about the article's claims and context – what are the most important points a reader should be aware of? Each of those points can be framed as a question that the participant's Task 2 report should address. For example, if the article makes a scientific claim, one question might be "What do scientific studies say about [claim]?" If the article's author has a clear bias or affiliation, a question might be, "What bias does [author name] have when reporting [subject]?" Make a list of these potential questions. Aim for **about 5 to 10 questions** per article as a guideline (there's no strict rule – some articles might need a bit more or fewer). Ensure the questions **collectively cover all major facets** of evaluating the article's trustworthiness.
3. **Formulate Clear, Focused Questions.** Now, refine the wording of each question on your list. Each question in your rubric should be clear and **focused on a single aspect**. **Avoid compound questions** that ask about multiple things at once (e.g., "Who is the author and what is their affiliation?"). Also, **avoid overly broad or vague questions** like

"Is the article credible?". If a question seems too general, try tying it to a specific claim or element in the article. For example, rather than a broad "Are there other sources corroborating the article's claims?", you might ask a more pointed question about a particular claim: "Have other sources corroborated the article's claim that wildfire frequency is declining?" Focus on what a reader needs to know versus what might simply be curiosities.

4. **Research and Draft Answer Nuggets for Each Question.**
    a. For every question you include in the rubric, write a concise **answer nugget** that directly answers that question based on your research. An answer nugget is usually one sentence that captures the key fact or insight the reader should learn. It should be factual and to the point. You may phrase it in your own words or quote directly from a source – if you quote, use quotation marks. The answer nugget should be something you could imagine appearing in a well-researched report.
    b. Every answer nugget must be backed up with **at least one reference (URL)** supporting that nugget. **Each reference (URL to a web page) should independently verify the nugget.** Use reliable, credible sources – prioritize things like established news outlets, academic papers, authoritative reports, or well-regarded reference sites. It's acceptable to use the same reference for multiple nuggets if it contains information relevant to each, but avoid overly relying on a single source for everything. Also, use **English-language text-based sources** (i.e., the nugget can be derived from the text content of the web page, not pictures, audio, or videos) and sources that are likely to remain accessible (for example, a static article instead of a temporary social media post). If you find yourself needing to combine information from multiple references to answer one question, consider splitting into multiple nuggets, each with its own reference, so that each nugget is straightforward and well-supported.
5. **Review and Refine the Rubric.** *Skip importance labels for now; they will be assigned later by the primary assessor during consolidation.* Finally, read through your entire rubric (questions, answers, references) and check for completeness and clarity:
    a. Do the questions cover all major concerns about the article's trustworthiness? Imagine someone reads the participant's report – after answering all these questions, would they feel well-equipped to decide if the original article is trustworthy?
    b. Are the questions phrased clearly, without bias or implying a judgment? (We want neutral questions. For instance, instead of "Why is this article wrong about climate change?", a neutral phrasing would be "What do scientific sources say about the cause of climate change?")
    c. Are the answer nuggets factual, concise, and fully supported by the cited references? Double-check that each reference indeed backs up the statement in the nugget. If the connection isn't obvious, either clarify the nugget or choose a more direct source.

**Collaboration and Consolidation:** Each article (topic) in this track will be assigned to **three assessors** – one **primary assessor** and two **secondary assessors**. All assessors work **independently** on the above steps to create their own unlabeled rubric (5-10 questions each) for the article. After that, the **primary assessor** will gather the rubrics from the secondaries and **fuse** them into **one rubric of no more than 10 questions**. Use the following guidelines when assigning importance labels (i.e., how essential that question is for judging the article's trustworthiness), but the primary assessor's judgment prevails:

- Have to know: This question addresses a core aspect of trustworthiness. The answer is critical for a reader to make an informed judgment.
- Good to know: This question covers important context that strengthens a reader's confidence in their judgment, though it may not be absolutely make-or-break.
- Nice to know: This question provides useful background or additional context that is helpful but not essential. These are more like bonus information that enriches understanding.

If a question appears in all three rubrics, it's highly likely to be a "have to know" question; if it appears in two, it is probably a "good to know"; and if it appears in only one, it is likely "nice to know." Consider also the perspective of an average reader: What information must they have to evaluate the article, and what information would merely be helpful or interesting? Use these labels to prioritize the questions accordingly.

The **core goal** here is not to dream up tricky questions, but to leverage thorough research to pinpoint what information **needs to be in a good report**. In effect, you first create a research-based *mini-report* for yourself on the article, and then extract from it the questions and answers that will form your rubric. By focusing on factual findings and key trustworthiness factors, you ensure your rubric is grounded in evidence and directly tied to Task 2's objectives. The final rubric will then be used in the report evaluation phase.

## IV. Report Evaluation

Once the participants have submitted their Task 2 reports (this is anticipated in late August, after Task 1 & 2 completion), the next phase is to evaluate those reports using the rubric you developed. The exact procedure for report evaluation will be determined based on the remaining assessment budget, but here is how the report evaluation will work:

- **Automatic Question Evaluation:** The organizers will use an automated process to compare the questions in your rubric with the questions generated by participants in Task 1. This is to measure how aligned participant-generated questions in Task 1 are with the expert assessor-generated questions. You do not need to do anything for this step; it's an analysis that the track coordinators will handle.
- **Manual Report Evaluation (Primary Assessors):** For each assigned article, the **primary assessor** will manually evaluate every participant's Task 2 report. Using the final consolidated rubric as a checklist, you will go through each participant's report and

determine **which rubric questions are satisfactorily answered** in the report. Essentially, you are checking the report's content against your expected answers:

## V. Online Self-Paced Training (Optional but Recommended)

Before or during your work on rubric creation, it's highly recommended to familiarize yourself with the verification skills that will be invaluable for this task. If you are already experienced in digital fact-checking and lateral reading, you may skim this section. Otherwise, consider completing the CTRL-F verification skills training, an online self-paced course developed by CIVIX Canada, which covers core techniques for assessing what information to trust online. The training takes approximately 2–3 hours. Use the checklist below to guide you through:

1. **Home**: Navigate to the CTRL-F student home page: https://ctrl-f.ca/en/student/home/.
    - ☐ Read the page content.
    - ☐ Watch the embedded video: Intro to Verification Skills | CTRL-F.
    - ☐ Click the "Begin" button at the bottom of the page to start the training. This will take you to the "Why Verify?" tab.
2. **Why Verify?**: https://ctrl-f.ca/en/student/why-verify/
    - ☐ Read the page content.
    - ☐ Play the "FakeOut" game by clicking "Play now".
    - ☐ Watch the embedded video: CIVIX Explains: Information Pollution.
    - ☐ Click "Next" to continue to the "Source" tab.
3. **Source**: https://ctrl-f.ca/en/student/source/
    - ☐ Read the page content.
    - ☐ Watch the embedded videos:
        - ☐ Investigate the Source | CTRL-F
        - ☐ Skill: Just Add Wikipedia | CTRL-F
        - ☐ Skill: Advanced Wikipedia – Bias & Agenda
        - ☐ Why Use Wikipedia? (supplemental)
        - ☐ Tips and Tricks for Using Wikipedia (supplemental)
        - ☐ Evaluating Expertise | CTRL-F
        - ☐ CIVIX Explains: Persuasive Sources
    - ☐ Go through the three examples in the "Test your skills" section.
    - ☐ Click "Learn the next skill" to continue to the "Claim" tab.
4. **Claim**: https://ctrl-f.ca/en/student/claim/
    - ☐ Read the page content.
    - ☐ Watch the embedded videos:
        - ☐ Check the Claim | CTRL-F
        - ☐ Skill: Check Other Sources | CTRL-F
        - ☐ Skill: Advanced Claim Check | CTRL-F
    - ☐ Go through the three examples in the "Test your skills" section.
    - ☐ Click "Learn the next skill" to continue to the "Trace" tab.

5. **Trace**: https://ctrl-f.ca/en/student/trace/
    - ☐ Read the page content.
    - ☐ Watch the embedded videos:
        - ☐ Trace the Information | CTRL-F
        - ☐ Skill: Click Through & Find | CTRL-F
          *(You may skip the video "Skill: Search the History of an Image," as our focus is on textual news content.)*
    - ☐ Go through the first example in the "Test your skills" section *(the remaining examples involve image history and can be skipped)*.
6. Congratulations! You have completed the training!

## VI. Final Words

By following this guide, you will produce a detailed rubric that encapsulates what a trustworthy analysis of the news article should include, and you will be prepared to evaluate the participants' reports with confidence and consistency. Thank you for your effort in this assessment process – your expertise is crucial to ensuring that the DRAGUN Track results in meaningful insights on how to assess news trustworthiness. Good luck with your assessments!