



How to tell what's true online

Workshop facilitator guide

This guide and script have been developed by MediaSmarts to support facilitators who are presenting the Break the Fake workshop. In it you will find some background information about the workshop, advice on preparing and presenting the workshop, a supporting script, Frequently Asked Questions and handouts for participants.

This workshop is designed for a general audience ages 11 and up. If you are presenting it in a school setting, consider using it as part of the lesson ***Break the Fake: Verifying Information Online.***



A photograph of two young women with dark hair, wearing patterned tops, looking at a laptop screen. The woman on the left is smiling, while the woman on the right has a neutral expression. The laptop screen is the central focus, displaying a table of contents.

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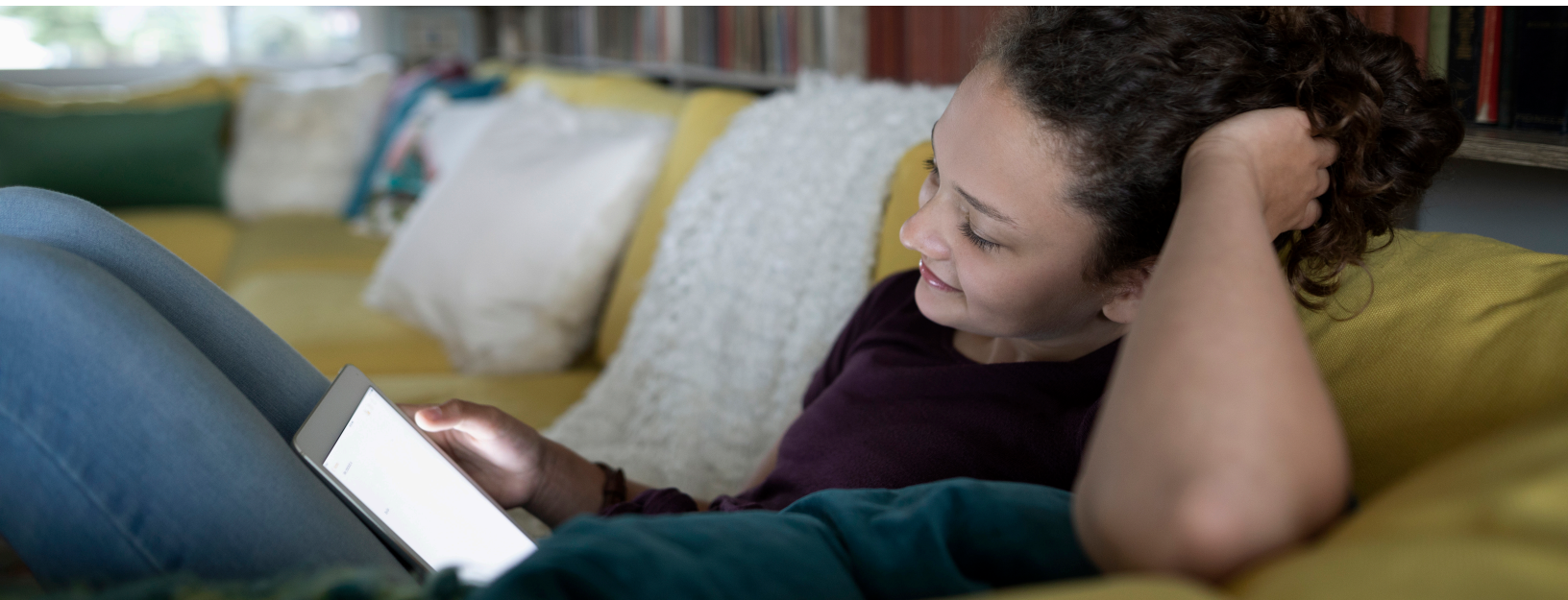
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19 Workshop Script

This project has been made possible
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Canada

Background



To solve the misinformation crisis, we have to make fact-checking a habit.

A generation ago, the classic “House Hippo” public service announcement taught Canadians to be skeptical about what we see onscreen. Today that message is more important than ever, with the added challenge that each of us is not just a media consumer but a broadcaster as well.

Canadians agree that misinformation (sometimes called “fake news”) is a serious problem: MediaSmarts’ recent research found it was the top concern parents had for their children online, ahead of issues like cyberbullying and internet predators, and other research has shown half of Canadians admit to having been fooled by it.

Our social media feeds are increasingly flooded with fake or misleading material, and while some misinformation is aimed at getting people to believe a particular message, its overall effect is to make it harder for people to believe anything. (For example, the Russian Internet Research Agency created fake Facebook groups protesting both against and in favour of Black Lives Matter.)

The result is a population of what Mike Caulfield, of the Digital Polarization Institute, calls “gullible cynics” who are paralyzed by doubt—or else prone to debunking anything that doesn’t confirm what they already believe.

Like buckling a seat belt, to become a habit something has to be quick and easy enough to do it every time. MediaSmarts’ “Break the Fake” program teaches four steps to verify (or check) online information, each of which can be used alone or in combination with the others and will almost never take more than a minute to do.

Misinformation is a big problem, but it is one we can solve. By taking a few quick, easy steps to verify what we see online – and making a habit of doing it every time we’re about to share or act on something – ***we can all help to Break the Fake.***



Documents to Help You Learn More

To learn more about fact-checking, online verification and misinformation, visit the section on the MediaSmarts website titled ***Authenticating Information***. There you will find articles, tip sheets, lesson plans, videos and short games that address this issue in more detail than this workshop is able to.

Conducting the Workshop



Preparation

Presenting to an audience can be challenging, even for experienced speakers, so here are some tips and suggestions for helping you successfully deliver the Break the Fake workshop.

Tips for Facilitators

- Before conducting your first workshop, take some time to go through the workshop to familiarize yourself with the content.
- Print off the script and study it until you feel comfortable with the information.
 - This workshop is designed so that you **can** present it by reading directly from the script. Your audience will get more from it the more familiar and comfortable you are with the material.
- Don't be daunted by the number of slides! Most of them take 30 seconds or less to read.
- Some slides have animation on them that is triggered by a mouse click. Watch for those in the script.
- To help you plan your workshop, we recommend visiting the venue beforehand to find out what technologies are available.
 - If possible, make sure the venue offers WiFi and check that participants have been told to bring internet-connected devices such as tablets and smartphones.

- As you go through the presentation, envision how you will present it to your audience. Imagine any questions that might arise, and review the Frequently Asked Questions section of this guide to prepare your answers to them.
 - Optional: Prior to the workshop, print enough copies of the handouts for the number of audience members you expect. Encourage participants to pick these up on their way in.
 - Read the Frequently Asked Questions section. This has been designed to be a printable handout, so you may choose to print copies of this as well.
 - At the beginning of the workshop, ask participants how many have internet-connected devices they can use in the live exercises. Encourage any who do not have devices to partner with someone who does.
 - There are websites listed for each of the live exercises. Most of them use shortened bit.ly links, which some participants may not be familiar with. Explain to participants that these are **not** the actual web addresses of the examples but rather shortcuts, and they simply need to type what's on the screen into the address bar of their browser, e.g. "bit.ly/monkeygod".
 - While there are points following each live exercise where you ask the participants for feedback, you should ask them to hold their questions until the end of the workshop.
- The Frequently Asked Questions section covers those questions that have been asked most often. If you're asked a question that isn't covered there, send it to info@mediasmarts.ca.

Optional Post-Workshop Activities

- 1. Break The Fake Race. (15 minutes)** Organize participants into group of three or four. Have each participant scroll through one of their social network feeds until they find something that needs to be verified. Have the group discuss together what steps to take and have each group member see who can successfully verify it first.
- 2. Breaking the Fakes In Your Life. (20 minutes)** Lead a discussion with the full audience about which of the steps they see as being most useful or relevant to the kinds of information they encounter online. What challenges do they think they might face? What can they do to help themselves, and their family members, make fact-checking a habit?
- 3. Reality Check. (30 minutes)** Organize participants into groups of five and have one member of each group complete one of the missions in the Reality Check online game (<https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/educational-games/reality-check-game>). Have the participants compare notes about which of the steps and techniques they learned in the workshop were useful in the mission they completed.



Frequently Asked Questions About Fact-Checking

Why do people share false or misleading information (also known as misinformation)?

Four main reasons:

- Because they don't know it's misinformation, and think or would like to believe it's true
- Because they really believe it
- To make money from it
 - Examples: YouTube views, ad clicks on websites, selling stuff to people who believe it
- For fun, to see how many people will believe it

- To make people more divided and make it harder for anyone to know what's true about anything
 - This is usually the point of misinformation spread by governments and corporations. (For example, misinformation spread by tobacco companies was aimed at making people think that cigarettes were just one of many causes of lung cancer.)

How do I respond when someone else is sharing misinformation?

Because social media makes us all broadcasters, we have a responsibility not just to avoid sharing misinformation but to take action when people in our network share it.

The best way to approach correcting people is to not think about it in terms of winning an argument. **Don't** just tell someone they're wrong: not only does that not work, it can make people believe more strongly in what they shared. Instead, give them details that fill the space of the old belief with a new, more convincing "story."

Encourage the other person to be skeptical about the subject. Point out who would benefit from people believing the misinformation.

If the topic is strongly connected to one side or another in politics, try to use language that isn't politically charged. Look for common values (people who support and oppose vaccination both have their beliefs because they love their children, for example) and frame things in positive ways.

How do I know if it's worth responding to someone who's sharing misinformation?

You don't have the time or the energy to engage with everybody who's sharing misinformation online. Be aware that it's rare for people to change their minds when they're under pressure or in front of an audience: if it happens, it will be a while after a person has been forced to see an issue in a new light.

Here are a few tips for deciding whether someone is worth arguing with:

Do they have a bad track record? This is the modern-day version of "the boy who cried wolf": whether it's someone you've tangled with before or simply a well-known troll (internet slang for someone who makes unsolicited or controversial comments in online spaces to provoke an emotional reaction or to engage in a fight or argument), some people have lost the right to be taken seriously.

Do they seem mostly focused on wasting your time? Sometimes trolls try to derail conversations or just tire out the people they're arguing with. If someone is repeatedly asking you to define or explain basic ideas, it may be a sign that they're just trying to keep you arguing.

How likely are they to listen to you? You have more of a responsibility to correct misinformation when it's coming from friends and relatives, because within the networks you share it will seem like you agree with them if you don't say something

Are they only being negative? A good sign that someone's unwilling to consider the other side of an issue is if they only argue against it, without putting forth any positive arguments.

Is there an undecided audience? Sometimes it's worth challenging information you know is false, not to convince the other person but instead to convince others who are watching – or just to show that not everyone agrees with what they're saying.

Remember that users of social networks set the tone and values of those spaces, and it's the voice of the loudest 10 percent that does that. In fact, it can be easier to change a society's values than a single person's mind: as a society, we've changed our views on issues as big as whether LGBTQ people can marry, whether women should have full rights, and whether or not slavery is wrong – often by framing the issue so that the new view seemed more in tune with people's basic values.

Why should I trust biased news sources?

All sources have **some** bias, but there are very few cases where the coverage at a reliable news outlet is openly biased. News sources are most often biased towards what their readers or viewers believe. Reporters and editors often have unconscious biases, and all news outlets are biased towards what they see as being “newsworthy.” Part of what makes a source reliable is that it tries to avoid bias, it corrects its mistakes, and it publishes stories that its owners and readers might not agree with. (For example, the ***Washington Post***, which has the same owner as Amazon, has published articles critical of Amazon.)

- It's important to separate **news** coverage from **editorials**, which are opinion pieces written by the outlet's editors and staff columnists; **analysis** articles, which are written by experts and interpret news; and **op-eds**, which are opinion pieces written by people who don't work for the outlet..

To find out if a source has a bias that keeps it from being reliable, use the ***Verify the source*** step. To avoid the bias in any single source, use the ***Check other sources*** step to see how other outlets are covering the story.

How can I know if a Wikipedia article is reliable?

While it's true that anyone can edit Wikipedia, most articles are pretty accurate overall – and there are ways to tell if one isn't. Editors put cleanup banners on articles that have significant problems: a banner doesn't mean an article is totally unreliable, but it's a sign you need to check another source.

Next, click the Talk tab and see the article's grade. You'll also be able to see here if there are any parts of the article that editors disagree about.

What's the most important thing I can do to fight misinformation?


The biggest way you can make a difference isn't by debunking misinformation, it's helping to make sure there's more good than bad information out there. Every time you're about to share something you see online, or any time someone shares something with you, take at least one of the four steps we covered in the workshop:

- Use fact-checking resources
- Find the source
- Verify the source
- Check other sources

If, after that, you're not sure something is true, **don't** share it.

If you **are** sure something is true, **do** share it.

Because we're all part of the networks that spread good and bad information, we're all part of the problem – and part of the solution. We can make a difference by spreading more good and less bad information online.

A close-up photograph of a man with glasses and a young girl looking at a tablet together. The man is in the background, wearing a patterned jacket over a white shirt. The girl is in the foreground, wearing a dark blue shirt, and is pointing at the tablet with her right hand. The text "Workshop Handouts" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Workshop Handouts

TIP SHEET #1:

Use fact-checking tools



Sometimes a single search can Break the Fake if a professional fact-checker has already done the work for you.

- You can use a specific fact-checker website like Snopes.com, or our custom search engine bit.ly/fact-search:
- To look at a broader range of sources, do a search for the story with the word “hoax” or “fake” added.

eagle attacks drone



eagle attacks drone hoax



This lets you search all of these fact-checkers at once:

- Snopes.com
- Agence France Presse Canada
- FactsCan
- FactCheck.org
- Politifact
- Washington Post Fact Checker
- Associated Press Fact Check
- HoaxEye
- Les Decrypteurs

If you want to use a different fact-checker, make sure it's signed on to the International Fact-Checking Network's code of principles (see <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/signatories>).

- Because anyone can call themselves a fact-checker, you need to double-check if your search leads to sources you don't already know are reliable. Check out the **Find the source** tip sheet for more info.
- Remember that just because a fact-checker *hasn't* debunked something doesn't mean it's true. It can take a while for fact-checkers to verify a story, and not every one will verify every story.
- If no reliable fact-checker has covered it yet, move on to other steps like **Find the Source or Check other sources**.

Make sure to take these steps to double-check before you share anything we see online, every time. Because only you can Break the Fake.

TIP SHEET #2: Find the source



Because it's so easy to copy and share things online, it's important to find out where something originally came from before you decide whether or not to trust it. Someone might have shared it with you on social media, or a news story might be based on someone else's story.

- The easiest way to find the source is usually to follow links that will lead you to the original story. In social media like Facebook or Twitter, the link is usually at the **end or bottom of the post**.

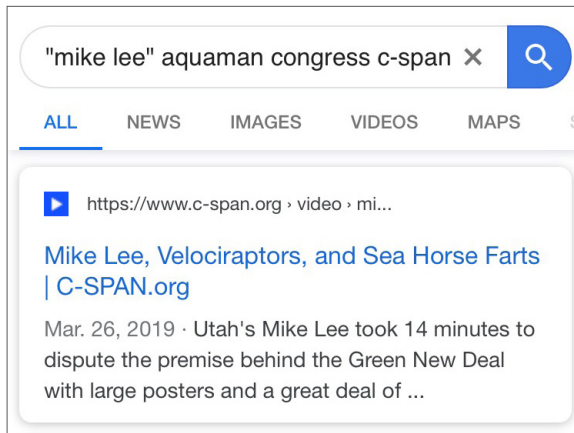
On a website, follow links that lead back to the source. Look for phrases like "According to" a source, a source "reported" or the word "Source" at the top or bottom of a story. Like in this example below – **click on highlighted words "Associated Press"**:



According to the **Associated Press**, The International Olympic Committee's executive board has recommended breakdancing, skateboarding, sports climbing and surfing be added to the 2024 Summer Games in Paris.

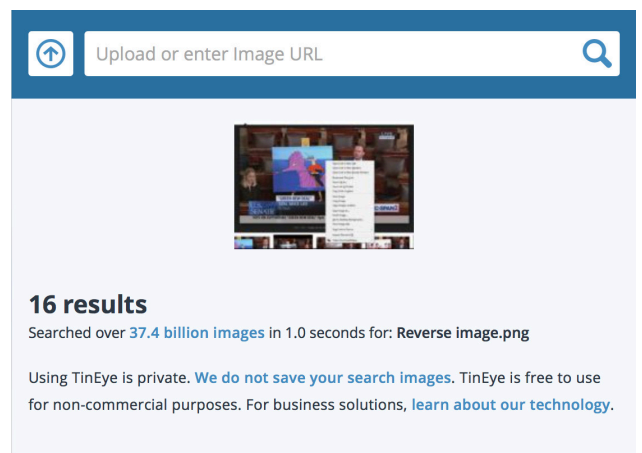
Make sure to keep going until you're sure you're at the original!

- You can also use a search engine like Google or DuckDuckGo. See if you can find any information about where the story originally came from and do a search like this:



- To find the original source of a photo or image, you can use something called reverse image search. Start by right-clicking on the image and selecting the option “Copy Image Location.” Then go to the website [Tineye.com](https://www.tineye.com) and paste in the address you just copied and sort the results to show the oldest first. See the example below:

- On a Mac, hold down Control while clicking instead of right-clicking.*
- On Chrome and Safari, select Copy Image Address.*
- On Edge, select Copy.*



If you don't know if the original source is reliable or not, use the **Find the source** tip sheet to find out.

If you can't find the original source, use the **Check other sources** tip sheet to see if the story is for real.

Make sure to take these steps to double-check before you share anything we see online, every time. Because only you can Break the Fake.

TIP SHEET #3:

Verify the source



Whether you're looking at a website, photo, video or news story, what really matters is whether or not the people who originally created it are trustworthy. Even when it has been shared with you by someone you trust, like a friend or family member, you can't know if they checked the facts. So it's up to you!

You can't always confirm that something is false, but if the source isn't reliable you have no reason to believe it.

To find out if a source is reliable, ask these three questions:

1. Do they really exist?

- It's easy to make fake pictures, fake websites and fake social network profiles that look just as real and professional as anything out there.

"About Us" pages and profiles are easy to fake, so use Wikipedia or a search engine like Google to find out if other people say they really exist. Pay attention to things that are hard to fake: for example, if somebody claims to work for a particular company, check the company's website or do a search for their name and the company's name to see if they've ever been mentioned together in reliable sources (like a newspaper you already know is real).

2. Are they who they say they are?

- It's easy to pretend to be someone else online, so once you know the source really exists, you need to find out if what you're looking at really came from them.



- Some social networks, like Twitter and Instagram, **verify** users by putting a blue checkmark next to their name. This does not mean they're necessarily a reliable source, but it does mean that they are who they say they are.



Statistics Canada twitter account

All News Images Maps Videos More

About 521,000,000 results (0.76 seconds)

Statistics Canada (@StatCan_eng) · Twitter
https://twitter.com/StatCan_eng

- To find out if you're on an organization's real website or social network profile, do a search for them and compare the top result to the site you're on.

3. Are they trustworthy?

- For sources of general information, like newspapers, that means asking if they have a process for making sure they're giving you good information, and a good **track record** of doing it. How often do they make mistakes? If they do make mistakes, do they admit them and publish corrections? Are they willing to publish things their owners, or their readers, wouldn't agree with? See this example from a search about the Washington Post:

The Washington Post (sometimes abbreviated as **WaPo**) is a major American daily newspaper published in Washington, D.C., with a particular emphasis on national politics and the federal government. It has the largest circulation in the Washington metropolitan area. Its slogan "Democracy Dies in Darkness" began appearing on its masthead in 2017.^[6] Daily broadsheet editions are printed for the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia.

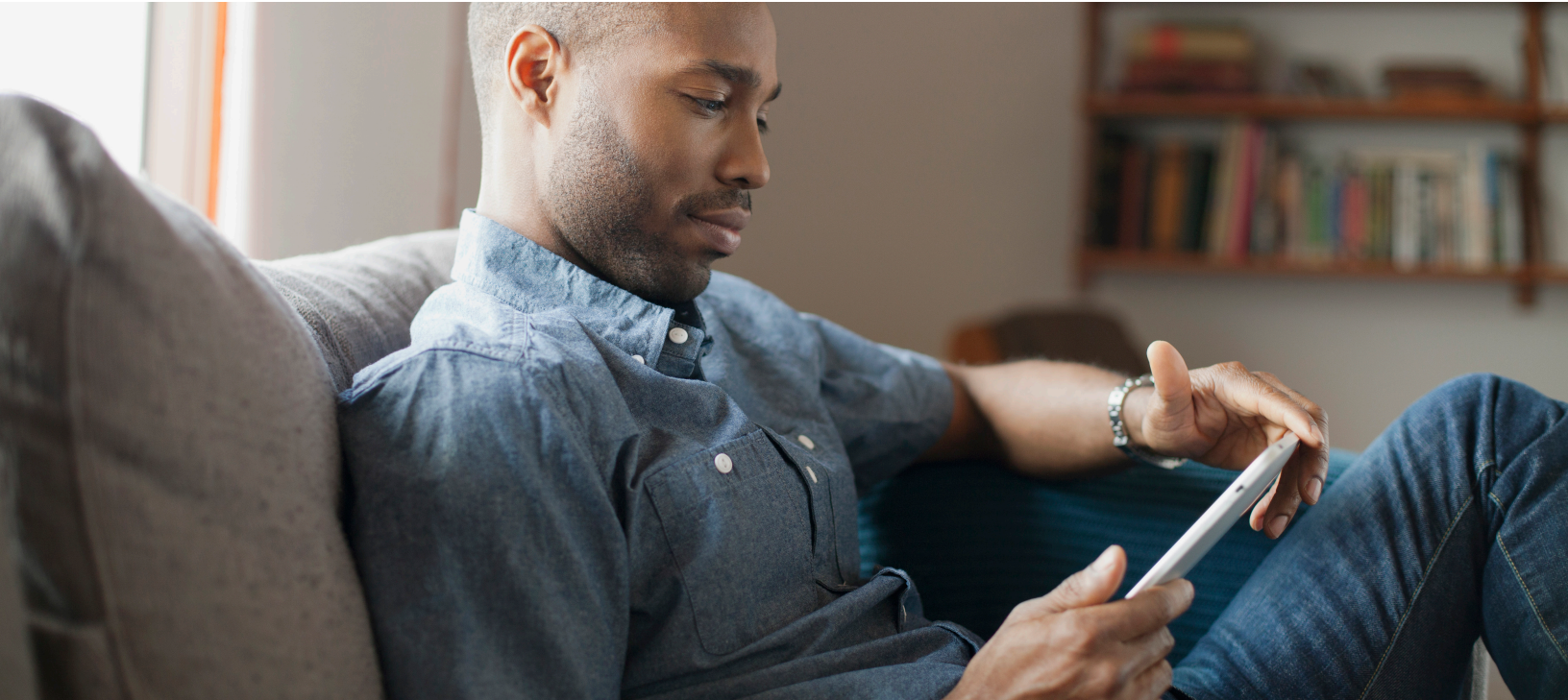
The newspaper has won 47 Pulitzer Prizes. This includes six separate Pulitzers awarded in 2008, second only to *The New York Times*'s seven awards in 2002 for the highest number ever awarded to a single newspaper in one year.^[7] *Post* journalists have also received 18 Nieman Fellowships and 368 White House News Photographers Association awards. In the early 1970s, in the best-known episode in the newspaper's history, reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein led the American press's investigation into

- For more specialized sources, you want to ask whether they're **experts** or **authorities** on that topic. Being an expert is more than just being a doctor, a scientist or a professor: make sure they are an expert in the area that they are talking about.
- You also want to make sure their position isn't biased, but don't mix up bias and authority. A biased source starts with what they believe and then chooses or interprets the facts to fit those beliefs. Someone who is actually an expert on something will probably have stronger opinions about it than someone who isn't – but they'll be better-informed opinions.

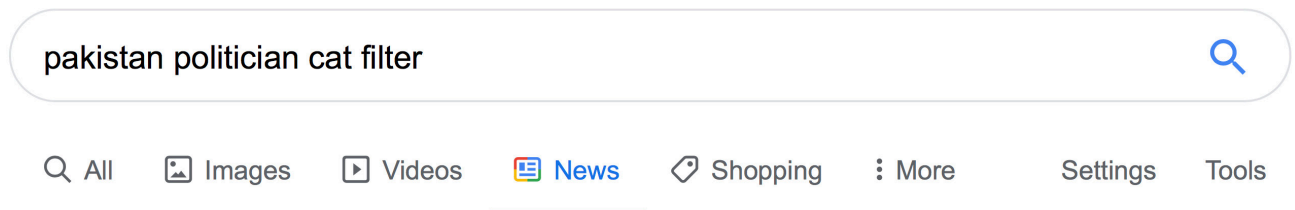
Make sure to take these steps to double-check before you share anything we see online, every time. Because only you can Break the Fake.

TIP SHEET #4:

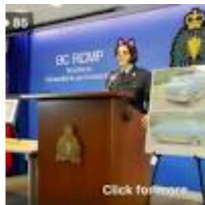
Check other sources



This step may sometimes be the last one you do, but it could also be the first. The News tab is better than the main Google search for this step because it only shows real news sources. While not every source that's included is perfectly reliable, they are all news outlets that really exist. Here is an example of how this works:



About 8,620 results (0.68 seconds)

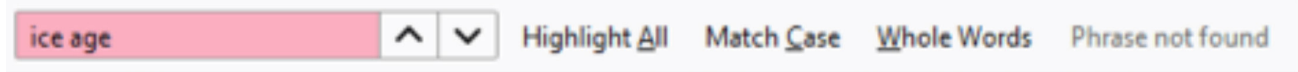


Canadian police embarrassed after **cat filter used on Facebook video ...**
[Express.co.uk](#) - Jul. 23, 2019

Last month, the **cat filter** was also used during a **Pakistani politician's** press conference. Shaukat Yousafzai was updating journalists on ...

- By taking this step, you can be sure you get the whole story. Remember, all sources make mistakes sometimes, but reliable ones will correct them.
- Looking at other sources can help you find out if the first place you saw something might have been leaving something out. This is also a good way of discovering any possible *bias* that might exist in any one source

Use Control-F (Command-F on a Mac) to quickly search a website for a word or phrase.



- You can also use this step to find out whether something agrees with what most experts on that topic think – what’s called the consensus view. While it’s generally good reporting to give both sides of a story, including views that experts agree aren’t right can result in spreading misinformation.
- You can use our custom search bit.ly/science-search to find the consensus on specialist topics like science and medicine.

If you want to know if another specialist source is reliable, check out the **Verify the source** tip sheet.

Make sure to take these steps to double-check before you share anything you see online, every time. Because only you can Break the Fake.

TIP SHEET:

How to tell what's true online



Critical thinking isn't about doubting everything: it's about learning how to find out what is true. Because only truth can Break the Fake.

Here are four quick and easy steps to find out the truth and share good information. Sometimes you only have to do one of these things, and most steps take less than a minute.

Use fact-checking tools

Sometimes a single search can Break the Fake, if a professional fact-checker like [Snopes](#) has already done the work for you.

- You can use our custom search engine bit.ly/fact-search.
- If no reliable fact-checker has covered it yet, move on to **Find the source** or **Check other sources**.

Find the sources

Because it's so easy to copy and share things online, it's important to find out where something originally came from before you decide whether or not to trust it.

- The easiest way to find the source is usually to follow links that will lead you to the original story.
- Use a search engine. See if you can find any information about where the story originally came from and do a search that includes that.
- If no reliable fact-checker has covered it yet, move on to **Find the source** or **Check other sources**.

Verify the source

Whether you're looking at a website, a photo or video, or a news story, what really matters is whether or not the people who **originally created** it are trustworthy. You can't always confirm that something is false, but if the source isn't reliable you have no reason to believe it.

To find out if a source is reliable, ask three questions:

1. Do they *really* exist?

"About Us" pages and profiles are easy to fake, so use a search engine or Wikipedia to find out if other people say they really exist. Pay the most attention to things that are hard to fake.

2. Are they *who they say they are*?

It's easy to pretend to be someone else online, so once you know the source really exists, you need to find out if what you're looking at really came from them.

3. Are they *trustworthy*?

For sources of general information, like newspapers, find out if they have a process for making sure they're giving you good information, and a good track record of doing it.


For more specialized sources, find out whether they're experts or authorities on that topic. Do a search and make sure that they are an authority in the right field.

Check other sources

This step may sometimes be the last one you do, but it could also be the first. It's a quick way of finding out if a source might be biased, or if a news story is true.

- The News tab is better than the main Google search for this step. While not every source that's included is perfectly reliable, they are all news outlets that really exist.
- You can also use this step to find out whether something fits with what most of the experts on that topic agree – what's called the consensus view. Use our custom search bit.ly/science-search to find the consensus on specialist topics like science and medicine.

Make sure to take these steps to double-check before you share anything you see online, every time. Because only you can Break the Fake.



Workshop Script

1. Welcome to the Break the Fake workshop! Today you'll learn four easy ways to tell if something is true online. Now, to start off...
2. Which of these pictures is real?
3. This one is!
4. Which of these news sources is real?
5. This one is!
6. Which of these websites is real?
7. This one is!
8. How many of you got all three right?
9. There's no easy way to spot misinformation online. It's as easy to make a fake website as a real one, and computer graphics technology that just a few years ago was limited to big-budget Hollywood movies is now available on free smartphone apps.
10. Because everything on the internet is **connected**, it's also easy for misinformation to reach lots of people.
11. Sometimes people share misinformation by accident – because they really think something is true and it's not, or because they don't think that other people will take it seriously. Most of us have probably shared something we thought was real without checking: we're more likely to share things we feel strongly about, especially things we hope are true.
12. But a lot of the misinformation online isn't trying to get us to believe a particular thing: it's actually designed to make us doubt whether **anything** is true.
13. That's why even seemingly harmless examples of misinformation matter. Online misinformation hasn't just made us easier to fool; it's made us more cynical. If we can't tell what's true it feels safer to assume that everything is fake.
14. But critical thinking isn't about doubting everything: it's about learning how to find out what is true.

Because only truth can Break the Fake.
15. In this workshop, we're going to look at four steps you can take to find out if something is true or not:

Use fact-checking tools,

Find the original source,

Verify the source,

And check other sources.
16. Once you've learned them, none of these will take you more than two minutes to do, and some will take just ten seconds! Just one of will usually get you the answer you need, but it's good to know how to do all four.

I'll show you a few different ways to do each one, and then you'll get a chance to try it out.

17. Sometimes a single search can break the fake, if a professional fact-checker has already done the work for you.

18. Thanks to computers it's easy to make fake pictures, and a lot of times people will share them without knowing they're fake.

Take these photos of the pyramids shared by two popular Twitter accounts, [Piclogy](#) and [History Lovers Club](#). They both look pretty real, don't they? Or do they both look fake?

Both accounts have shared plenty of fake and misleading photos.

We could do the detective work ourselves – I'll show you how in a minute – but it's easier to let somebody else do it.

19. Let's start with the grandfather of all fact-checking sites, [Snopes.com](#). They've been around since the early days of the internet and they fact-check all kinds of things.

20. When we go to the site and [search for "zeppelin over pyramid"](#), we can see [that they've already confirmed that this photo is for real](#).

21. When we search Snopes for "[pyramid clouds](#)," we find that they've also [checked this photo out](#) and found that it's false.

22. There are also fact-checkers that specialize in different topics, like health or politics or different countries.

23. Another way you can see if someone's debunked a false or misleading news story is to do a search for the topic of the story and add the words "fake" or "hoax" to your search.

24. This can be a bit risky, because anyone can say that something is a hoax, so you need to make sure the people debunking it are reliable.

25. To be sure a fact-checker is reliable, see if they've signed on to the [International Fact-Checking Network's Code of Principles](#).

26. We've made a [custom search engine](#) you can use at this address to search all of these.

27. Here's an exercise that will show you just how quickly you can find out if something is true or not. [This video of Toronto Raptors fans](#) cheering when a Golden State Warriors player Kevin Durant got injured was seen and shared more than a million times on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Take a few minutes to find out if it's true using one of the skills we've just learned.

28. ***(When more than half of the people in the crowd seem to have finished – no more than 3-4 minutes)*** So what do people think – is it true or not? How did you find out?

29. You can get the answer either by [doing a search with the word "hoax" or "fake" added](#),

30. or by using our custom fact-checker search.

31. Either one leads us to [Fact Check AFP](#), where we can see that the video is a fake: the original is actually from a soccer game in 2016, and footage of the basketball game on the screen has been edited in.
32. [Snopes, though, didn't have anything on this story](#) – which shows you that just because a fact-checker *hasn't* debunked something doesn't mean it's true.

If nobody else has fact-checked a story for you, move on to the next step, **Find the Original Source**.
33. Because it's so easy to copy and share things online, it's important to find out where something originally came from before you decide whether or not to trust it. Someone might have shared it with you on social media, or a news story might be based on someone else's story.
34. One easy way to find the original source is to use a search engine. We might wonder if this post that seems to show a US Senator [displaying a picture of Aquaman to Congress](#) is real. As we already saw, pictures are easy to fake -- and pictures where someone is holding a sign are *especially* easy, because you just have to change what's on the sign.
35. We can [do a search for his name, Aquaman, and C-Span](#) – where the picture supposedly came from –

Click on the link to C-Span –
36. – And we see that it actually does come from [C-Span's footage of the US Congress](#).
37. Another way to find out if a photo like [this one of astronomer Carl Sagan](#) is real is to do a reverse image search. Click on the image, then right-click and select "Copy Image Location."
38. Next, go to TinEye.com and paste in the address.
39. If we sort the results to show the oldest first,
40. [we can see right away that there's a different version of the photo](#). Because the two are exactly the same except for what's on the sign, it's most likely the older one is the original.
41. Even if something you see is real, though, it may not be what the source that shared them says they are. [This photo](#), for example, is not actually of Charlie Chaplin but an actress named Telma Talia.
42. That's why it's important to **follow links** in a story until you get to where information actually came from.
43. That's especially important on social networks, where we usually pay more attention to who shared something with us rather than where it originally came from.
44. If there aren't links, look for phrases like

"The New York Times reported" or

45. The word “Source” at the top or bottom of a story.

If something presents you with facts or statistics but doesn't tell you where they came from, there's no way to know if you can trust them.

46. This story from “[Bleacher Report](#)” claims that breakdancing and skateboarding are going to become official Olympic events. When we scroll down a bit we see that it's based on earlier stories from Reuters and the Associated Press, which are both reliable sources.

47. To make sure that Bleacher Report is giving us an accurate picture of what those sources reported, we can [follow](#) the [links](#)

48. right-click to open them in new tabs – and we see that the story is true.

49. Make sure, though, that a story really is from that source. Lots of websites, including many reliable sites like the [Reuters news service](#), carry “sponsored content” – paid links to stories on other sites.

50. If there aren't links in the story, you can do a search for the topic plus the sources that are given, [like this](#).

51. We can also use a reverse image search to see if a photo really is what it seems to be. According to this tweet, [this photo](#) shows a terrible mess left behind after an environmentalist protest, but

52. following the steps we learned a few minutes ago shows that [the picture is actually from a concert in 2014](#).

53. Now it's your turn. Did explorers [really](#) find hundreds of animals that were thought to be extinct at a place called the Lost City of the Monkey God? Take a few minutes to find the original source of this story and see if it's true or not.

54. (***When more than half of the people in the crowd seem to have finished – no more than 3-4 minutes***) So what do people think – is it true or not? How did you find out?

55. It probably didn't take you very long to see that this story was true. Even though you may have no reason to think “[All That's Interesting](#)” is a very reliable source,

when we scroll down just a bit we can see that the story actually came [the Independent](#), a well-known British newspaper.

56. But what if you didn't know whether the Independent was a reliable source? And how do we know that is their real website, anyway?

We'll answer all those questions when we look at the third step, Verify the Source.

57. Whether you're looking at a website, a photo or video, or a news story, what really matters is whether or not the people who **originally created** it are trustworthy. You can't always confirm that something is false, but if the source isn't reliable you have no reason to believe it.
58. This is the only time when it matters what order you do the steps in. Reliable sources do sometimes share things that turn out not to be true, and unreliable sources sometimes share things that are true. That's why you shouldn't bother **verifying** a source until you know for sure it's where the information **originally** came from.
59. When you do, you need to ask three questions. First, **does this source really exist?** We saw earlier how easy it is to make fake pictures online, and it's just as easy to make a fake website or [social media profile](#).
60. Second, **are they who they say they are?** It's also easy to **impersonate** people online and create **impostor** sites or social network accounts.
61. Finally, **are they reliable?** Anybody can claim to be an expert online, so you need to make sure that there are good reasons to think that someone is a reliable source.
62. These days it's easy to make websites that look just as slick and professional as anything that's out there. In fact, some trustworthy sources may **look** less professional than fake sites because they haven't put time or money into updating their website.
63. People who spread misinformation on purpose often invent local newspapers or TV news stations. This kind of source seems trustworthy but most of us aren't likely to have heard of a paper or TV station in a different city or country.
64. Here are two websites that claim to be from Sherbrooke, Quebec – the [Times](#) and the [Record](#). Which one is real?
65. Both of them have an "[About Us](#)" or "[Contact Us](#)" page with a street and email address and the names of people who work there. But then, all of that is easy to fake.
66. Instead, let's go to Wikipedia and see if there's an article there about the [Sherbrooke Record](#).
67. (You don't have to go to Wikipedia to search, by the way: you can just put what you're looking for in the search box and add "Wikipedia.")
68. From the Wikipedia article we can see that the Record has been around for more than a century and there's no reason to think it isn't a reliable source.
69. How about the Times? There isn't an article about it in Wikipedia, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's not real: Wikipedia is written by volunteers, so a lot of things don't have entries.

70. Instead we can do a search on Google. The only results we can find are the website itself, its Twitter account, and articles pointing out that it's [a fake](#).
71. It's easy to pretend to be someone else online, so once you know the source really exists, you need to find out if what you're looking at really came from them.
72. Did Toronto Police really put out [a warning](#) about a man in a Spider-Man costume webbing streetcar lines?
73. Some social networks, like Twitter and Instagram, **verify** users by putting a blue checkmark next to their name. This does **not** mean they're necessarily a reliable source, but it does mean that they are who they say they are. [In this case](#) it means this is a real Toronto police account, which means the story is true.
74. It's a bit harder to make sure you're on the right website. People have made fake versions of real news websites like [The Guardian](#) and the [CBC](#) that look almost exactly like the real thing.
75. But there are things that are harder to fake. A web address by itself won't tell you if a site is reliable – for instance, sites with dot-org addresses aren't necessarily more trustworthy – but the web address can tell you if you're on an organization's real website.
76. If you're satisfied a source is real and is who they say they are, you have to find out whether they're **trustworthy**. For sources of general information, like newspapers, that means asking if they have a process for making sure they're giving you good information, and a good **track record** of doing it.
77. This becomes important when you're looking at sources that aren't fake, but that may give you only part of the story, or may not have high standards in making sure what they post is accurate.
78. Reliable sources do sometimes share things that turn out not to be true, and unreliable sources sometimes do share things that are true. In general, though, if you see a story from a source you know is reliable you can assume it's probably true.
79. Let's look at another pair of newspapers, the [Washington Times](#) and the [Washington Post](#). They're both real newspapers, and neither one is entirely unreliable – but one is more reliable than the other.
80. There are signs you can look for to decide how reliable a news source is. How often do they make mistakes? If they do make mistakes, do they admit them and publish corrections? Are they willing to publish things their owners, or their readers, wouldn't agree with?

81. If we look up the [Washington Post on Wikipedia](#), we see it's been around since 1877 and has won 47 Pulitzer Prizes for journalism. It's not perfect – they've published a few stories that turned out to be inaccurate, which they retracted and corrected publicly – but overall it has a good track record.
82. [The Washington Times](#) has also been around for awhile – since 1982 – but their track record isn't as good: most of the Wikipedia article is about times they've spread misinformation about everything from the ozone layer to second-hand smoke.
83. That doesn't mean the *Times* is an entirely unreliable source, or that the *Post* never makes mistakes – but it does mean that most of the time, you'll do a lot better trusting the *Post*.
84. For more specialized sources, you want to ask whether they're *experts* or *authorities* on that topic. Being an expert is more than just being a doctor, a scientist or a professor: make sure they are an expert in the right field. A [cardiologist](#) would be an expert in treating your heart, but not on [vaccines](#).
85. Some sources – like certain professional groups or government agencies – are recognized *authorities* on particular topics. What they say carries more weight than any single expert in the field, and a lot more than a person or group who isn't an authority.

How do you know who's an authority?
Remember, anyone can call themselves [a "university"](#)
[or an "institute"](#) on the internet.
86. [or an "institute"](#) on the internet.
87. [This](#) news story on how to get cheaper flights is based on a survey by an organization called Skyscanner. The advice in it – including the tip to book through a travel website instead of directly from an airline – comes from Alex Astaniev, one of their "travel industry experts."
88. [A search for Skyscanner](#) shows us they they are a travel website,
89. while a [search for Astaniev's name](#) shows he's actually their product manager.
90. Remember that a LinkedIn page, like any other social network account, is easy to fake, so you'll want [at least one more piece of evidence](#).

Now we know that Skyscanner is not an authority and Astaniev is not an expert.

91. You give it a try. Take look at two similar-looking groups, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and the [American College of Pediatricians](#), that both claim to represent American pediatricians. Which one are we more likely to trust?
92. (*When more than half of the people in the crowd seem to have finished – no more than 3-4 minutes*) So what do people think – which one is more reliable? How did you find out?
93. They both claim to represent American pediatricians, and both have professional-looking websites that provide lots of general information. But if we [do a search for the AAP](#) and scroll past the result for their own website, we can see they have sixty-four thousand doctors as members.
94. A [search for the ACP](#) shows they have just 500 members, and a much weaker claim to be an authority on children's health.
95. Looking more closely shows us the ACP is not just unreliable because it's not an authority – like Skyscanner, it also has a strong **bias**. The whole reason its members split from the AAP was because they were opposed to letting gay and lesbian parents adopt children.
96. It's important, though, not to mix up authority and bias. Someone who is actually an expert on something will probably have stronger opinions about it than someone who isn't – but they'll be better-informed opinions too.
97. The difference is that the AAP's positions, on everything from car seats to when the school day should start, are based on the **expertise** of their members; the ACP's are based on their **beliefs** about sexuality.
98. Our last step, Consult Other Sources, may sometimes be the last one you do, but it could also be the first. It's a quick way of sifting out bias and finding out whether something like a news story is for real.
99. Did [this politician](#) really do a Facebook Live video with a cat face filter?
100. If we do a search for "[Pakistani politician cat filter](#)" and switch to [the News tab](#) we see the story was covered by many different news outlets, from Global News in Canada to the BBC.
101. In this step we're not worried about the reliability of a single source, we're looking for a **consensus** among mostly reliable sources that something actually happened. The News tab is better than the main search for that because it's more **curated**. While not every source that's included is perfectly reliable, they are all news outlets that really exist.
102. This step is also important for getting **context** – making sure you get the whole story. Remember, all sources make mistakes sometimes, but reliable ones correct them. Consulting other sources can help you find out if the first place you saw something might have been leaving something out. This is a good way of dealing with the possible **bias** in any one source.

103. You can also use this step to find out whether something fits with what most of the experts on that topic agree – what’s called the **consensus** view.

104. In fields like medicine, science and history, consensus has been built up over time, with each new piece of evidence tilting the scales in its favour. Something that goes against the consensus may turn out to be right, but it needs **more** and **better** evidence to outweigh the consensus.

105. While it’s generally good to give both sides of a story, including views that experts agree **aren’t** right can actually spread misinformation.

An [article on the pyramids](#), for example,

106. doesn’t have to mention that [some people think they were built by aliens](#).

107. News outlets and Wikipedia aren’t always the best place to look for consensus on health and science, though, because the people writing the articles often aren’t experts. For those topics, you want to turn to sources you know are authorities.

Here’s [another video](#), this time claiming the North Pole is moving.

108. We’ve made a [custom search](#) that looks just at sources whose writers are experts in the fields they write about.

109. A quick search for “north pole moving” tells us while not every detail in that video might be true, it is true the magnetic pole is shifting.

You can use this step together with the last one, by building your own toolbox of sources you’ve confirmed are reliable.

110. Now it’s your turn. According to this article in the Express, scientists at NASA have said we’re heading into a “solar minimum,” which may cause a “mini ice age.” Take a few minutes to use the skills we’ve covered in this step to find out.

111. ***(When more than half of the people in the crowd seem to have finished – no more than 3-4 minutes)*** So what’s the story? How did you find out?

112. We can check this with all three of the different skills we’ve covered in this step, though each one would give you the answer by itself.

113. If we do a news search for “[solar minimum ice age](#),” we find that most of the results are this story in the Express – and all the others are sources you’ve probably never heard of. If no other sources are covering this, it’s probably not really news.

114. We can quickly check [the Wikipedia article on “solar minimum”](#) by pressing Control-F and searching for “ice age,” which shows it isn’t even mentioned. If we want to take another minute and browse the article we’ll see the term “solar minimum” refers to sunspots and solar flares, not temperatures.
115. Finally, a search of our expert sources shows us that while the “solar minimum” is real, it won’t result in cooler weather on Earth.
116. Let’s wrap up with a final test.
- Have people really found [rice with plastic](#) mixed up in it?
- Is this beautiful lake [actually a toxic waste dump](#)?
- For each one, pick which of the steps we’ve covered you think will be the quickest way to verify it, and try that first. If that doesn’t work, go on to another one.
117. Now turn to someone next to you and compare notes. Did you come to the same conclusions? Did you use the same steps to get there?
118. *(When more than half of the people in the crowd seem to have finished – no more than 3-4 minutes)*
- There are a few different ways we can fact-check each of these, but in each case there’s one quickest way. Several fact-checking [sites](#) have debunked the “plastic rice” story, so we can easily find out that’s false.
119. For the second story, we just have to [follow the links](#) to the original source to see it’s from the New York Times,
120. and so probably true.
121. Just to be sure, we can check the web address to make sure this is the real New York Times site.
122. Now that you’ve learned all the steps, it probably didn’t take you more than a minute to check both of those. That’s good, because for misinformation to spread, people like us have to share it.
123. That’s why we have to take these steps to double-check before we share anything we see online, every time – because only **you** can Break the Fake.