

LESSON PLAN

Break the Fake: Becoming a Fact-Checker

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grades 10-12

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This lesson plan is part of the [Break the Fake](#) project. This lesson has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

Overview

This lesson is designed to help students determine the validity of information that is presented to them on the Internet. After reviewing a series of evaluation techniques for online resources, students form groups to assess selected websites.

****Note to Teachers:**

Break the Fake: Becoming a Fact-Checker is an online exercise designed to help students determine the validity of information that is presented to them on the Internet. Teachers should check the links that are provided for the activities to ensure they are functioning correctly.

Although we have endeavoured to link only to sites suitable

for secondary students, there is always the possibility of encountering potentially offensive materials on, or through, some sites.

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to distribute the following handouts:

- *Break the Fake: Find the Source*
- *Break the Fake: Verify the Source*
- *Break the Fake: Check Other Sources*
- *Correcting Misinformation*

Prepare to distribute the assignment sheet *Fact-Checking Video*

Prepare to project the following videos:

- Using Fact-Checking Tools: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD-tjLfbc54>
- Checking Other Sources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGc377ZpMWk>
- Finding the Source: <https://youtu.be/OUfBEGADU8w>
- Verifying the Source: https://youtu.be/7Oum9QS_498
- Correcting Disinformation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4JAe7WDHgo>

- Does Caffeine Cause Hair Loss? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6ab3ekWZ94>

Ensure that students are able to access the websites *Teen Fact Checking Network* website <https://mediasmarts.ca/teen-fact-checking-network> and *Digital Story Maker* <https://digitalstorymaker.mediasmarts.ca>

Procedure

Start by asking students whether they agree or disagree with the following statements. (You can have them raise their hands, write down their answers, or just answer in their heads.)

- People in my family count on me as a source of good information.
- I often see things online that I'm pretty sure aren't true.
- I sometimes don't do anything about false information because I'm not sure what the truth is.
- I sometimes don't do anything about false information because I'm afraid of hurting people's feelings.
- I sometimes don't do anything about false information because I don't think anyone would listen to me.

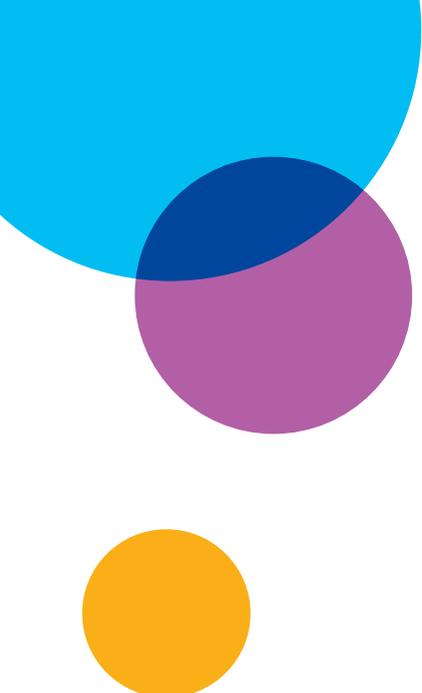
Tell students that many people their age feel responsible for making sure that their friends and, in particular, their families get good information.

As well, many young people say they look at the comments of a post before deciding whether to believe it or not, so it's important to respond when you see something you think is false or misleading.

FOUR STEPS TO VERIFY INFORMATION

Tell students that you are going to do a quick "refresher" on how to verify information so that they can help their families and correct false or misleading information when they see it. Emphasize that this is just to remind them of things they have most likely already learned.

Distribute the handouts *Break the Fake: Use Fact-Checking Tools*, *Break the Fake: Find the Source*, *Break the Fake: Verify the Source* and *Break the Fake: Check Other Sources*.



Show the video *Finding the Source*. Go through the *Break the Fake: Find the Source* handout and ask students in what situations that step would be more or less useful: when is it easy to follow a claim or story back to its original source? When would that be more difficult? (For example, Instagram posts and TikTok videos don't usually include a link to any claims being made.) Show the video *Verifying the Source*. Go through the *Break the Fake: Verify The Source* handout and ask students how they can tell whether a source is biased or not.

(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.)

Now show the video *Checking Other Sources*. Go through the *Break the Fake: Check Other Sources* handout and ask students why the News tab is more useful for this step than the standard search. (It only shows news sources that really exist—though they may each have their own biases.)

Explain that sometimes if this step doesn't turn up any results — in other words, if no other sources are covering a story — that's a sign that you should be skeptical. Point out the value of Wikipedia in identifying *consensus* (what most people who are expert on a topic think is supported by the evidence) Finally, mention that sometimes it can be useful to *limit* your search to only sources that you already know are reliable.

Show the video *Using Fact-Checking Tools*. Go through the *Break the Fake: Use Fact-Checking Tools* handout and ask students what kinds of claims or stories would be easier or more difficult to verify using fact-checking tools. (For instance, a big news story is more likely to be fact-checked; things that happen in Canada are less likely to be fact-checked, because we have fewer fact-checkers.)

CORRECTING MISINFORMATION

Remind students of some of the reasons why people choose not to correct false or misleading information when they see it: because they're not sure what *is* true, because are afraid of hurting someone's feelings, and because they don't think anyone will listen.

Now show the video *Correcting Disinformation* and the handout *Three Ways to Correct Misinformation*. Go through the handout, then ask students which strategy they would use to respond to each of the posts. (Make sure they understand that in these scenarios, Jared is a classmate working on a project with them, and Lloyd is a family member.)

You can have students write their answers individually or in pairs if you prefer, or simply take the question up as a class.

Now discuss the two posts. Make sure the following points come up:

Jared and the Titanic:

- The stakes are high here: if you let Jared use that theory, you might fail your history report, so it's not enough to question it.
- Also, because this is a private message, there isn't an audience to worry about.
- Since you and Jared have to work together, you'll probably want to debunk this politely and say something like "I looked through the Titanic article on Wikipedia and there's nothing about it being switched with another ship."

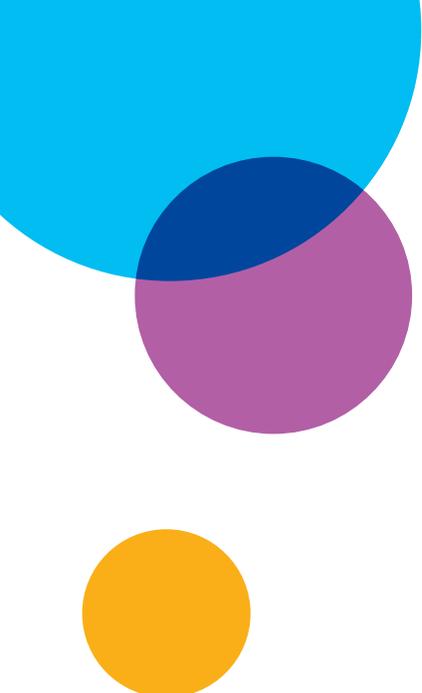
Uncle Lloyd and ticks:

- If Uncle Lloyd likes to argue, you would probably be better off just asking a question, like "Are you sure? Maybe they just never mentioned it to you."
- If you feel comfortable, the best thing would be to correct him by providing accurate information from a reliable source, like "The Johns Hopkins Medicine site says there are 300,000 new cases of Lyme disease each year, and the longer you wait to treat it the worse it gets."

ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY: FACT-CHECKING VIDEO

Tell students that they can do more than respond to things other people post: they can make their own fact-checks too. Besides helping anyone who might have seen a false claim, fact-checks "pre-bunk" the claim for people who haven't seen it and also make more people feel comfortable correcting misinformation when they see it.

Show students the first ten seconds of *Does caffeine cause hair loss?* and then pause.



Ask:

- Why might you want to fact-check this story? (A lot of people drink coffee, and people worry about losing their hair!)
- How would you fact-check this? (Remind students of the four steps covered earlier.)

Now show the rest of the video and then ask:

What steps did the fact-checker use? (Find the source, Check other sources and Verify the source.)

Which one worked best? Why? (Check other sources, because she was able to compare what sources she knew were reliable said on the topic.)

Distribute the assignment *Fact-Checking Video* and go through it with the class.

If students have the time and ability to make on-camera videos, print only the first page of the assignment sheet and give them links to a video editing app or platform such as [Capcut](#) or [a similar alternative](#).

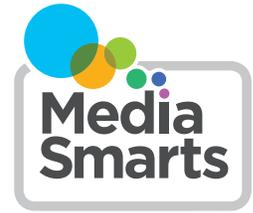
Explain that they will find a claim that they are not sure is true and fact-check it using the four steps you reviewed in class. They will then make a fact-checking video that will show the claim, the steps they took to verify it, and their final verdict.

Note: Students' use of screenshots or screen captures is considered Fair Dealing under the Copyright Act because it is being done for critical and educational purposes. For more information, see the article [Fair Dealing for Media Education](#).

In case students have difficulty finding a claim to verify, you may want to consult these websites ahead of time to find examples:

- Associated Press News: Oddities (<https://apnews.com/oddities>)
- Snopes (<https://www.snopes.com/>)
- Lead Stories (<https://leadstories.com/>)
- Not the Onion (<https://www.reddit.com/r/nottheonion/>)

Do not tell students whether the claim is true or false. Do not send students directly to these sites, as some contain inappropriate content.



BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

BREAK THE FAKE: FIND THE ORIGINAL SOURCE

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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.

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!

On a video or social media post, see if the sources are listed in the post or the description. If there aren't any, use the Verify the Source step to see if the person posting it is a reliable source.

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 including the name of the source.

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 and paste in the address you just copied and sort the results to show the oldest first.

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

BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT- CHECKER

Something that is real can be also misleading if it you see it in the wrong *context*. Take a look at these pictures and captions:



Look at all this trash left after the rock concert! Clean up your mess.

www.towncrier.ca/parktrash



Look at all this trash left after the environmental protest! Start by cleaning up your own mess.

www.towncrier.ca/parktrash

How do the different contexts (a rock concern or an environmental protest) change the meaning of the photo?

If you can't find the original source, use the *Consult Other Sources* tip sheet to see if the story is for real.



BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

BREAK THE FAKE: VERIFY THE SOURCE

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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:

- 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).

- 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 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. But on others, like X, the blue checkmark just means they've paid for a premium account.

To find out if you're on an organization's real website or social network profile, do a search or check Wikipedia to find their official web address or account.

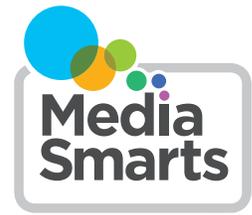
- Are they trustworthy?

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?

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.

The same is true for groups that say they represent groups of doctors or scientists. A quick search will usually show you if they are for real. The American Academy of Pediatrics has 67,000 members. The American College of Pediatrics, on the other hand, has just 700.

You also want to make sure they have a strong reason to give you accurate information. Do a search to find out if accuracy and credibility are a big part of why people watch, read, buy or trust a source.

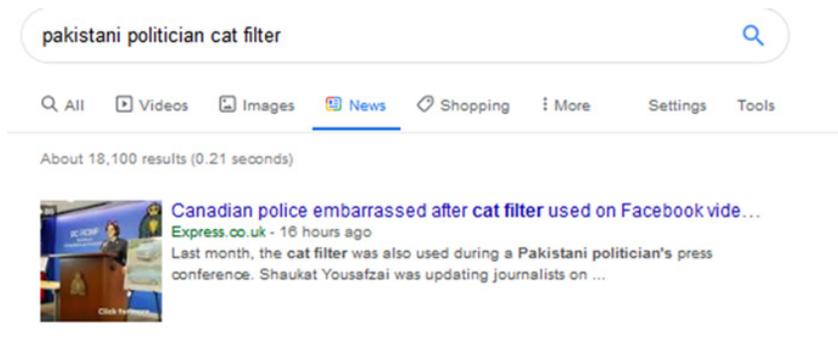


BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

BREAK THE FAKE: CHECK OTHER SOURCES

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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:



You can also use our custom news search, bit.ly/news-search, which searches ten Canadian and international sources of reliable news.

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

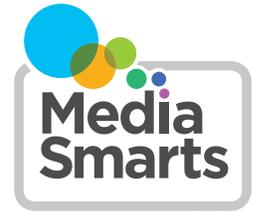
You can also use this step to find out whether something agrees with what most experts on that topic think – what's called the consensus view. While it's generally good reporting to give both sides of a story, including views that experts agree aren't right can result in spreading misinformation.

Wikipedia is a good place to find the consensus on a topic because each Wikipedia article represents the consensus of its editors. Just remember to watch for warning banners that suggest a specific article might not be reliable.



You can use our custom search tiny.cc/sciencesearch 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.



BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

BREAK THE FAKE: USE FACT-CHECKING TOOLS

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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, or our custom search engine: <https://mediasmarts.ca/fact-checker>

It's a custom search engine that lets you search several fact-checkers at once, including: Snopes.com, Agence France Presse Canada, FactCheck.org, Politifact, Washington Post Fact Checker, Associated Press Fact Check, HoaxEye and 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>).

Some of those principles are:

- A commitment to non-partisanship (not favoring any group or political party) and fairness
- A commitment to standards and transparency of sources (showing the evidence behind a judgment)
- A commitment to transparency of funding and organization (where their money comes from)
- A commitment to open and honest corrections policy (posting corrections quickly and clearly when they make a mistake)

To look at a broader range of sources, do a search for the story with the word "hoax" or "fake" added.

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-checkers has covered it yet, move on to other steps like Find the source or Check other sources.



BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

THREE WAYS TO CORRECT MISINFORMATION

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There’s always something you can do when you spot false info online.

Here are three ways to respond:

1. QUESTION IT

If the false info is coming from a friend or a family member, or you’re worried that your reply might help spread the false info, you can just ask a question like “Are you sure that’s true?” or “Is that source reliable?”.

That nudges them to think more about whether what they’re sharing is true, and shows other people that you don’t agree with the bad info.

Research has found this works almost as well as correcting or debunking false information!

If you don’t want to do this where other people can see, you can always send it as a private message.

Try saying:

- “Are you sure that’s true?”
- “Where did you hear that?”
- “Is that source reliable?”

2. CORRECT IT

You can also correct false information by just giving accurate info on the topic. You might choose this if a lot of people will see what you post, or if you’re worried about making things worse by repeating the false information.

You don’t even have to mention the bad info to correct it, and you don’t have to tell someone they’re wrong. Just share accurate info that shows the truth.

Make sure your info is coming from a legitimate, trusted source, and show where it came from.

Remember that less is more! Keep it simple and give just enough to correct the bad info.

Say something like:

- “Health Canada has studied cellphone radiation for years and set guidelines to make sure it stays under safe levels.”
- “Statistics Canada says that there’s actually a lot less violent crime than there was twenty years ago.”

3. DEBUNK IT

If you can clearly show that the info is false, you can debunk it by saying it’s wrong and showing why. You might choose to do this if the false information has already spread widely or if the person sharing it has a bigger audience than you do.

Make sure to say how you found out it was wrong. That way, the person who shared it – and everyone else who sees your post – sees how to avoid sharing bad info.

If you’re replying to someone you don’t know, don’t link to the bad info: use a screenshot instead. Visit take-a-screenshot.org to find out how to do that on different devices. And make sure you don’t repeat a hashtag that’s being used to spread bad info.

BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

Stick to the facts: keep cool and don't be rude. Start with "I" so you don't sound like you're picking a fight.

Try saying:

- "I checked Snopes and they say that video is fake."
- "I looked up where that story came from and it's actually a parody site."
- "I did a reverse image search and that picture is actually from after a rock concert, not a protest march."

You may not convince the person who shared false info, but you can keep others from believing it

GIVE IT A TRY!

Which strategy would use you to reply to this? Why?

What would you say?

How about this one?

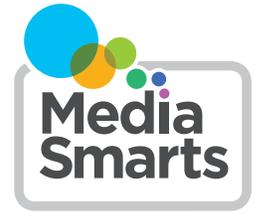


Which strategy would you use?

Why?

What would you say?





BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT-CHECKER

FACT-CHECKING VIDEO

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For this assignment you will make a video fact-checking a claim you have seen in your social media feeds. It can be something that is false, something that is misleading, or something that seems “too good to be true” - but actually is true!

What claim are you checking? (For example, the claim in the sample video was Caffeine causes hair loss.)

Where did you see the claim? (Make sure to get a screenshot or screen capture of the claim. Visit www.take-a-screenshot.org for more information on how to get screenshots. If you're using a phone or tablet, make sure the claim is in the middle of the screenshot so it doesn't get cropped out in a horizontal video.)

What steps did you take to fact-check it? (You should use at least two steps. Make sure to get screenshots of what you did in each step.)

What was your final verdict? Is it True, Mostly True, Misleading, Mostly False, or False? Why?

You can visit the Teen Fact Checking Network website (<https://mediasmarts.ca/teen-fact-checking-network>) to see more examples of student fact-checks.

BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT- CHECKER

Now visit the MediaSmarts Digital Story Maker at <https://digitalstorymaker.mediasmarts.ca>. You can use any device that has an internet browser like Chrome, Firefox, Safari and so on.

You can make an account with your name and an email address, or just a username.

If you use your email address, you'll have to open the email you get and click on the confirmation link. If you ever forget your password, a recovery email will be sent to that address.

If you use just a username, you will be logged in right away. **There is no way to recover a lost password** if you only have a username, so make sure to record your username and password.

To start making your digital story, click or tap “Start Here”:

Create a new digital story

Start here 

Next, go through the instructions. You will have already done a lot of this while planning your story and making your story table.

Give your story a name that shows the claim you are checking, then click or tap “Start”:

Start a New Digital Story

What would you like to call your digital story?

Story title

Start

Each **segment** is made of one image and one audio clip.

The images should be your screen captures that show the claim and the steps you took to fact-check it.

Click or tap “Someone else made this” and then “My use is Fair Dealing” in the box that pops up.

Before you can upload a file please answer the following questions..

Who made this?

I made this

Someone else made it

Why are you able to use it?

They said I could (paid license or personal permission)

It has a Creative Commons license

It's in the Public Domain

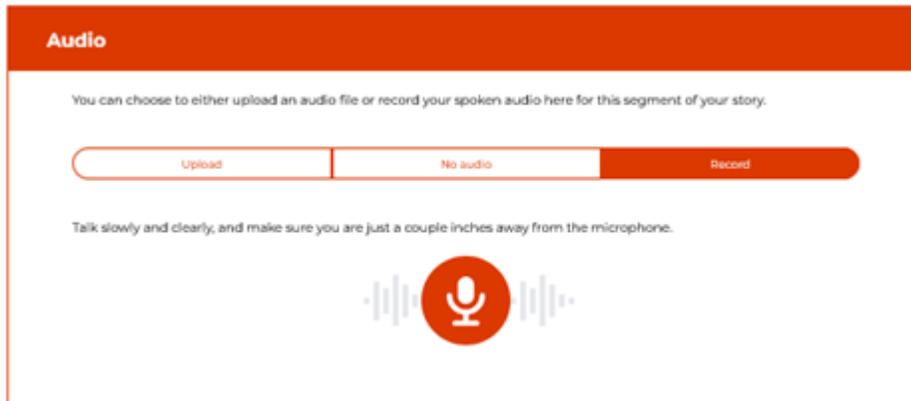
My use is Fair Dealing

None of those

BREAK THE FAKE: BECOMING A FACT- CHECKER

Next, record your narration for the segment. Click or tap Record and then the microphone icon to use the device's microphone. You can also record it your clips on a different device and then upload them by clicking or tapping Upload.

You have to choose the image and audio for each segment before moving on to the next one.



Once you have made all your segments (at least three) you can choose music.

You can play the different music options, and click or tap the circle next to the title of the one you want:

Choose a background music option for your video.



Now you can **render** your video. That turns it into a video format that you can play in other apps and on other devices.

To do that, click or tap *Render video*.

Once it's rendered, you'll be able to download it onto your own device by clicking or tapping *Download video*:



Needs rendering...

Length: 00:00:41

Segments: 5

Created: 2024-06-13

Render video