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.*

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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 ***Finding and Verifying 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 tiny.cc 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. "tiny.cc/queensbees".
- 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 though 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.)

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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.

Research has identified three effective strategies for responding to misinformation: asking questions, correcting the misinformation and debunking it. Which one is the best choice in a situation depends on a number of questions:

Do you want to avoid saying the person is wrong? Is the topic something people feel strongly about, like politics? Does the person have a history of arguing and ignoring others or facts? Are people who see the post more likely to listen to the sharer than you?

If you're not ready to correct or debunk bad information, question it. The idea is to nudge the sharer, and whoever else sees it, to really think about whether the content is accurate.

 Try saying:

* "Are you sure that's true?"
* "Where did you hear that?"
* "Is that source reliable?"

Will a lot of people see the post? Did the person share it without checking to see if it was true? Do you have accurate info that corrects the bad info? Do other people see you as an expert or an authority?

Then correct it. That means giving accurate information without repeating the misinformation.

Try saying:

* "Health Canada has studied cellphone radiation for years and set guidelines to make sure it stays under safe levels."
* "Statistics Canada says that the crime rate is a lot lower than it was 20 years ago."

Are you okay with saying the person who posted it is wrong? Did the person share it because it supports something they strongly believe in, even though they knew it might be false? Can you clearly show that the info is false?

If so, then you can take the power away from bad information by debunking it: showing that it's wrong and explaining how you found out it was wrong (such as by using MediaSmarts' fact-checker search).

Try saying:

* "I checked Snopes and they say that video is fake."
* "I checked other sources and it turns out that picture is actually from after a rock concert, not a protest march."
* "Fact-checkers have proven that the sign was Photoshopped."

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

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.

Workshop Handouts

Use fact-checking tools

Break the Fake.ca

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 *https://mediasmarts.ca/fact-checker*

eagle attacks drone	✕	🔍

This lets you search all of these fact-checkers and more:

- 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*).

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

eagle attacks drone hoax	✕	🔍

- 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.

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TIP SHEET #2:
Find the source

Break the Fake.ca

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 X, 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":**

Jade's Post

There we go again…. another worrying phenomenon and how many world leaders would use this kind of real data to back up their stance?

MSN.COM
It was 84 degrees near the Arctic Ocean this weekend as carbon diox…

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

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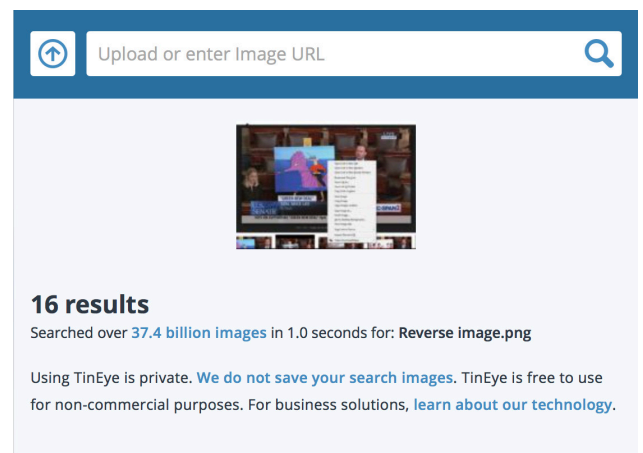
Make sure to keep going until you're sure you're at the original!

- 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:
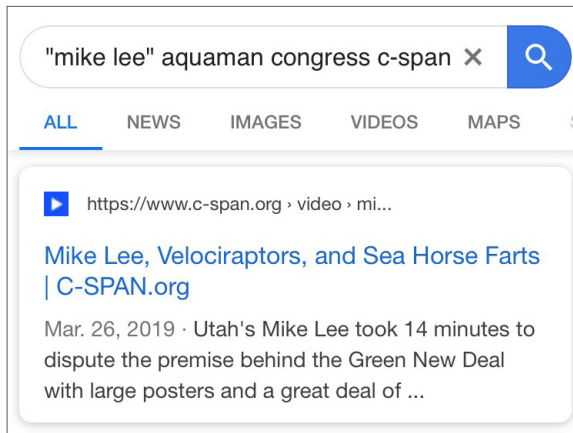
- To find the original source of a photo or image, you can use something called reverse image search. Start by right-clicking on the image and selecting the option "Copy Image Location." Then go to the website *Tineye.com* and paste in the address you just copied and sort the results to show the oldest 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.*

Reverse Image Search

Search by image and find where that image appears online

16 results

Searched over **37.4 billion images** in 1.0 seconds for: **Reverse image.png**

Using TinEye is private. **We do not save your search images**. TinEye is free to use for non-commercial purposes. For business solutions, **learn about our technology**.

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.

- 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. This looks like a real Toronto Star article, but a search shows that the web address ("freshnewtips.com") is wrong:

- 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.

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

- You can also do a search for their name and use a minus sign to leave out their own website, like this:

    "washington post" -washingtonpost.com

That will tell you what other people say about them.

- 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.

THE RICHMOND STANDARD
Funded by Chevron

- You also want to make sure they have a strong eason to give you accurate information. The Richmond Standard might give you accurate news about a lot of things. But because they're owned by Chevron, an oil company, you can't trust them to tell the truth about climate change or pollution.

- Not all sources are as open about their bias. Do a search to find out if accuracy and credibility are a big part of why people watch, read, buy or trust a source.

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.

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TIP SHEET #4:
Check other sources
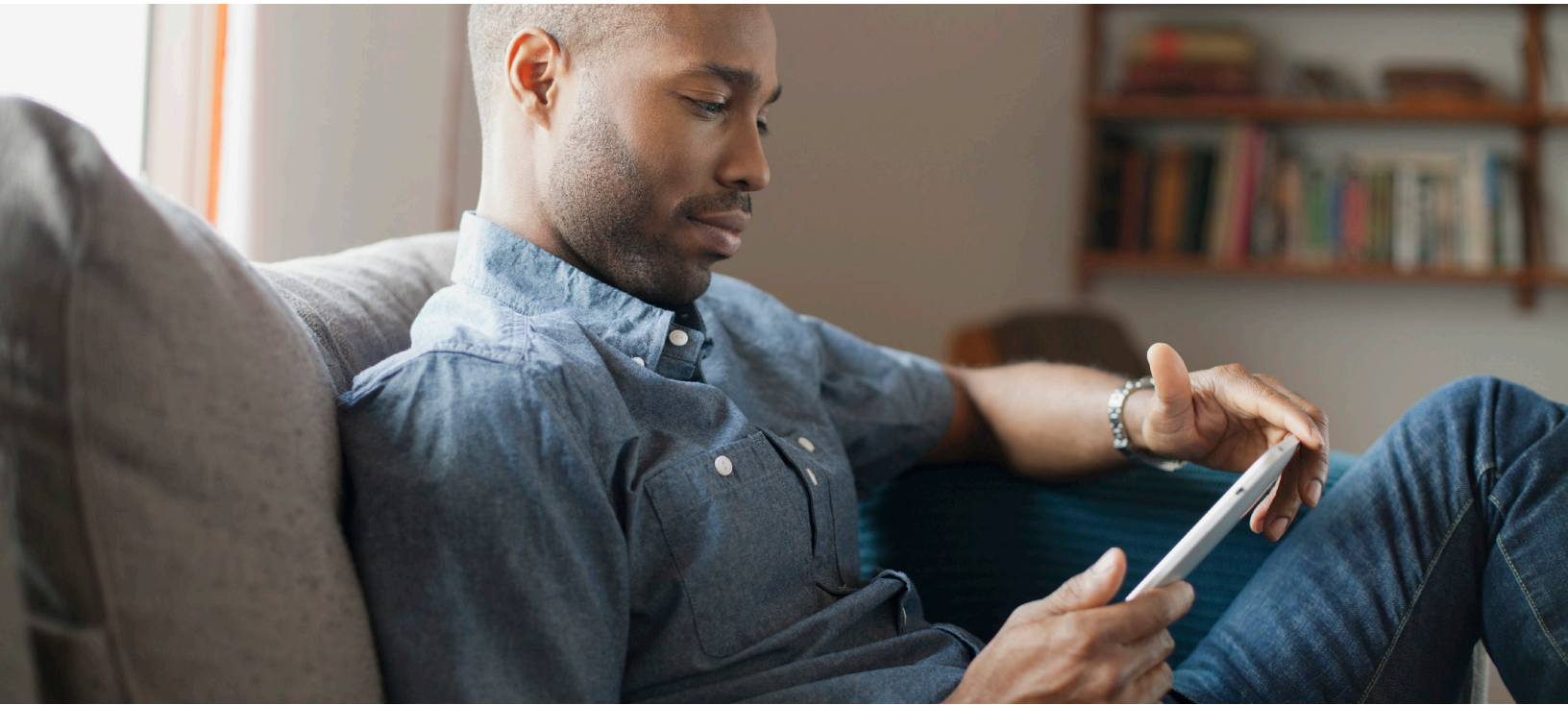
This step may sometimes be the last one you do, but it could also be the first. The News tab is better than the main Google search for this step because it only shows real news sources. While not every source that's included is perfectly reliable, they are all news outlets that really exist. Here is an example of how this works:

pakistan politician cat filter 🔍

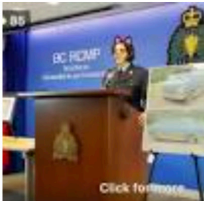🔍 All   🖼 Images   ▶ Videos   📰 **News**   🏷 Shopping   ⋮ More   Settings   Tools
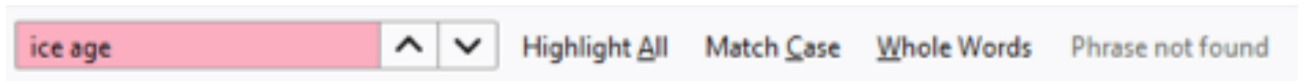
About 8,620 results (0.68 seconds)

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.

ice age	⌃	⌄	Highlight All	Match Case	Whole Words	Phrase not found

- 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 *https://mediasmarts.ca/break-fake/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 *https://mediasmarts.ca/fact-checker*
- 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 *https://mediasmarts.ca/break-fake/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 of Rihanna at the Met Gala is real, and which is a deepfake?

3. This one is real!

4. How about these two pictures of Henry Ford with his first prototype "quadcycle"?

5. This one is the real one.

6. Take a look at these two pictures of Tom Cruise with his stunt doubles.

7. Maybe you noticed these signs? AI image generators often have trouble getting text to look right.

   Or maybe you noticed the weird thing going on with their hands?

8. Weird or not, the photo on the left is a real picture of Tom Cruise and Keith Campbell, his stunt double on the movies "Mission Impossible" and "The Firm." The one on the right is the deepfake.

   The fact is that a lot of the time, there's no way to tell if a photo, a video, or anything else is real just by looking at it. If we're looking for reasons to think something is fake – like blurry text or a weird camera angle - we'll find it.

   There's no easy way to spot misinformation online. It's now easy to make completely fake images that are indistinguishable

from real ones, and the signs that tell us something might be a deepfake – like extra arms or fingers – are quickly becoming a thing of the past.

9. Because everything on the internet is connected, it's also easy for misinformation to reach lots of people.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. Not only that, but when we look for reasons why something might be fake, we're liable to find them – like these real photos of a political rally that people mistakenly thought were deepfakes.

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 them 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 (X) 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 grandparent 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 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.

    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.

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

25. The IFCN is a network of more than 170 fact-checking organizations around the world, with a commitment to nonpartisan and transparent fact-checking.

26. We've made a custom search engine you can use at this address to search several fact-checkers, like the ones here, all at once.

27. Here's an exercise that will show you just how quickly you can find out if something is true or not. Did Wendy's really introduce a new "emo" version of their logo?Go ahead and see if you can determine if this story is true or not. Try to use some of the steps and tools you've just learned about.

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?

    If delivering online: You can put your answer in the chat.

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 Snopes, where we can see that while the image is real, it didn't replace the original mascot – and was only used in one location.

32. If we look for information about the Henry Ford (quadricycle) deepfake we saw earlier, though, we find no fact-checkers have covered it – which shows 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, which says an Olympic athlete stopped washing his hands to prepare himself before swimming in the Seine, is true.

35. We can do a search for his name and "washing hands," and add the "Site" operator to search just the BBC website – where the story supposedly originated – open the results in a new tab –

36. and we see that it actually does come from the BBC's coverage of the 2024 Olympics.

37. Another way to verify a photo, like this one claiming that the Eiffel Tower is on fire, is to do a reverse image search.

38. Click on the image, then right-click and select "Copy Image Location" ("Copy Image Address" on a Mac or iPhone.)

    If you're doing it in an app, you might have to take a screenshot instead of copying the image location.

39. Next, go to Tineye.com and paste in the address or the screenshotted image.

40. We can sort the result to show us either the oldest version of the image or the most changed. Either of those can be useful to find out whether we're looking at the original version of the image.

    In this case, the fact that we see just seven results – most of which are from a website called "Joe" – tells us that these aren't real news photos. In fact, they're all AI-generated deepfakes.

41. Even if something you see is real, though, it may not be what the source that shared it says it is. This photo, for example, is not actually of Charlie Chaplin but an actress named Telmy Talia.

42. That's why you need to follow links in a story until you get to where information actually came from.

43. If there aren't links, look for phrases like "The New York Times reported" or

44. 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.

45. This story from the website "Blaze Media" says a man was arrested while trying to cross the Atlantic in a "human-powered hamster wheel."

46. We may have no particular reason to trust "Blaze Media," but that doesn't matter because it links to two sources that we know are reliable, NBC News and the BBC.

    To make sure that Blaze Media is giving us an accurate picture of what those sources reported, we can follow the links

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

48. If there aren't links in the story, you can do a search for the topic, like this.

49. 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

50. following the steps we learned a few minutes ago shows that the picture is actually from a concert in 2014.

51. Now it's your turn. Was Godzilla really named police chief for a day in Tokyo? Look for the original source of this story to find out.

52. *(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?

    If delivering online: You can put your answer in the chat.

53. It probably didn't take you very long to see that this story was true.

    Even though you may have no reason to think this site was reliable source – it's literally named "Jo Blo" - when we follow the link we can see that the story actually from 7 News in Australia, a reliable news organization.

54. But what if you didn't know whether 7 News was a reliable source? And how do we know that is their real YouTube channel, anyway?

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

55. 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.

    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.

56. 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.

57. Second, are they who they say they are? It's also easy to impersonate people online and create impostor sites or social network accounts.

58. 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 on the topic.

59. 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.

60. 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 – and it's easy to make completely fake news sites, like the Lansing Sun on the left, that look as professional as real ones like the Lansing State Journal.

61. Here are two websites that claim to be from Sherbrooke, Quebec – the Times and the Record. Which one is real?

62. 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.

63. Instead, let's go to Wikipedia and see if there's an article there about the Sherbrooke Record.

64. You don't have to go to Wikipedia to search, by the way: you can just put what you're looking for in a search engine and add site:Wikipedia.org.

65. (Why not just add the word "Wikipedia in the search engine? Because misinformation groups have started adding pages to their websites that challenge how Wikipedia describes them. They hope that you'll click on their version instead of the actual Wikipedia entry.)

66. 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.

67. 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.

68. Instead we can do a search on Google. The only results we can find are the website itself, its X account, and articles pointing out that it's a fake.

69. 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.

70. Unfortunately, one of the tools that used to help with this – verified accounts – is no longer helpful and can be actively misleading. Some social media platforms now allow anyone to pay for the check mark, even accounts like this one that actively spread disinformation.

71. Instead, you need to double-check a person's or organization's website to find their official social media accounts.

    To find out if this post arguing for human-dolphin hybrids really came from the Green Party of Delaware's official account…

72. … we need to find the Green Party's actual website, find the entry for the Delaware chapter, and confirm that was their real account on X (formerly Twitter.)

73. Then find the post on their account.

74. Of course, it's important to make sure you're on the right website. People have made fake versions of real news websites like The Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star 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. For instance, while both of those sites looked convincing, neither one had anything like the real web address.

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 get good information, a good track record of doing it, and a motivation to be accurate.

    In general, if you see a story from a source you know is reliable, you can assume the basic facts are probably true.

    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.

77. 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.

78. 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?

79. If we look up the Washington Post on Wikipedia, we see it's been around since 1877 and has won 65 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.

80. 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.

81. 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 one that's more reliable, which in this case is the Post.

82. 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.

83. How do you know who's an authority? Remember, anyone can call themselves a "university" or an "institute" on the internet, so you need to do some research to be sure – for instance by checking Wikipedia.

84. It's also important that someone is an expert or authority on a relevant 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 or relevant field.

    A dietitian would be an expert in what makes up a healthy diet, but not on vaccines.

85. Finally, ask whether they have a motivation to give you accurate information. If you didn't look closely at this online news site, "The Richmond Standard" --

86. -- You might not notice that it's actually run by Chevron, an oil company.

    Not all biased sources are even this transparent. A good rule of thumb is to ask: What would this source lose if people didn't think of them as a reliable source of accurate information? If the answer is "Not much" – if people don't mind how accurate they are so long as they are entertaining, or tell you things that you want to believe – then they're not trustworthy.

87. Here's a topic where we want to be sure the source is trustworthy – wild mushrooms. This book was written by Karen Stephenson, so let's see what we can find out about her.

88. Checking out her bio, we can see that she is a genuine expert in related fields. A quick search shows that what she says about herself is true and that she has a good track record of being seen as an expert by a legitimate organization- Lakehead University. All of that adds up to a strong motivation to give you accurate information about which mushrooms are safe to eat: if people get bad information from her books, it will cost her credibility and money.

89. This book, on the other hand, just has the publisher – "Qarrar Press" – listed as an author. While they've published a lot of books on mushroom picking, we have no way of knowing whether the staff at Qarrar Press have any expertise --

90. -- And the fact that they have so many books, all with the same publication date, suggests they don't have a robust process for making sure their facts are accurate.

    That's already enough to show we shouldn't trust them, especially on whether a mushroom is safe to eat or not, but to be sure we can do a search for their name --

91. -- And see that aside from their Amazon listing, the only results are articles claiming that their books were written by AI. This shows us that they have no motivation to be accurate: they're out to sell as many books as they can with the lowest possible cost, and if some people get sick or die from following the advice in their books it won't cost them too much.

92. Now you give it a try. Take a 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?

93. (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?

    If delivering online: You can put your answer in the chat.

94. 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 we can see they have sixty-seven thousand doctors as members.

95. A search for the ACP shows they have just 700 members, and a much weaker claim to be an authority on children's health.

96. Looking more closely shows us the ACP is not just unreliable because it's not an authority – 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.

97. 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.

    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, Check 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. Our last step, Check 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.

100. If we do a search for "Queen Wii bowling" and switch to the News tab, we see the story was covered by many different news outlets.

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.

    For instance, if we read some of these stories we'll see that the original post was a bit misleading: the Queen never actually owned the gold-plated Wii, and there's only one source that suggests she ever played Wii Sports Bowling.

103. Real content presented out of context – things like selectively edited videos or video games presented as war footage - is one of the most common forms of misinformation. This video, for instance, uses just 25 seconds out of a thirty minute video to make it seem like Microsoft founder Bill Gates said vaccination would kill millions of people. (He was actually making the argument that vaccination campaigns would lower the population because people in countries with high infant mortality wouldn't feel they had to have many children to make sure some survived.)

104. As well as getting context, this step is essential for finding out the consensus.

    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. Sources that are good for finding the consensus on a topic are not necessarily the best for getting specific facts, and vice versa.

106. Consensus is what encyclopedias like Wikipedia are all about. In fact, on Wikipedia you can use the "Talk" tab to see the discussions editors have had about what the consensus is. You'll want to check the references of any specific facts in an article, though.

107. Chat AIs are also all about consensus, because their answers are trained on billions of words of data, but they're not really trustworthy on specific facts. A study that asked ChatGPT to diagnose patients based on a list of symptoms, for instance, found it only gave correct answers half the time.

    Make sure to word the prompt carefully to be clear you want to know how strong the consensus is and whether any other theories are considered legitimate or fringe theories.

    You should also ask it to list and link to the sources it's drawing on, unless you're using an AI like Perplexity that does that automatically.

108. Search engines are good for finding specific facts – so long as you make sure to verify the sources – but because they only show you what you were looking for, they don't necessarily give you a sense of the consensus on a topic. "Explainer" articles, which give you a broad summary or overview of a topic, are a good way to find consensus – so long as they're from a source you know or can confirm is reliable. Because they're not written by experts, though, they may not be perfectly accurate on the facts.

109. On the other hand, articles from specialized expert sources, such as scientific journals, will give you accurate facts, but may assume you already know the context.

110. Finally, position statements from professional bodies – so long as they're legitimate ones like the Canadian Pediatric Society – can give you both a good sense of the consensus on a topic and accurate specific facts.

111. Here's an example of how we can use Wikipedia to find out the consensus view on who built the pyramids.

112. We can find out the consensus by reading the article, which shows us there's a clear consensus that they were built by the ancient Egyptians.

113. If we want to see whether any competing theories are worth mentioning – like whether they were made by aliens – we can just search the page to see that they aren't. (You can do that with Control F or Command F on a computer, or "Find in Page" on a mobile browser.)

114. Another option is to turn to sources you know are authorities.

    Here's another video, this time claiming the North Pole is moving.

115. We've made a custom search that looks just at sources on science whose writers are experts in the fields they write about.

116. 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.

117. Sometimes you can save time by going to a single best source first: to find out bus schedules, to get information about the election process, or to find out where and when your favourite musician is touring, for instance. For cases like these, it makes sense to go straight to the source.

    For instance, the easiest way to find out if "Italian beef" was really Pantone's "colour of the year for 2024" –

    - is to go straight to the Pantone web site. (It was actually "peach fuzz.")

118. Now it's your turn. Have scientists found evidence that humans and dinosaurs lived at the same time?

119. *(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?

    If delivering online: You can put your answer in the chat.

120. 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.

121. If we do a search for the key words in the claim and go to the News tab, we can see that the news article linked to in this post is real – there it is at the bottom of the search results – and other outlets covered the same story.

122. But following any of those links shows us that the findings were not about any kind of humans, but some of our earliest ancestors – the first placental mammals, which is to say mammals that were born alive instead of hatching from eggs.

123. But using our custom science search engine takes us straight to more authoritative sources that show right away humans did not live with dinosaurs.

    Although these results aren't as recent as the ones in the News tab, we still see one that's specifically about that news story – and makes it clear that the research wasn't about humans or even our near ancestors.

124. Let's wrap up with a final test.

    Is the fashion brand Prada going to start making space suits?

    And is the sun going into a "solar minimum" period which will cause freezing weather?

    For each one, pick the steps we've covered that you think will be the quickest way to verify it, and try that first. If that doesn't work, go on to another one.

125. 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?

126. There are a few different ways we can fact-check each of these, but in each case there's one quickest way. Several legitimate news sources have covered the Prada story, so we know it's real.

127. If we do a news search for "solar minimum ice age," we find that most of the results are ones debunking this story.

    If no other sources are covering this, it's probably not really news.

128. 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.

129. Finally, a search of MediaSmarts' expert sources shows us that while the "solar minimum" is real, it won't result in cooler weather on Earth.

130. Now that you've learned all the steps, it probably didn't take you more than a minute to check both of those.

    You can follow the link or QR code on the screen to a video that will help you remember and practice these four steps.

131. But remember, fact-checking only helps if you're honest with yourself: conspiracy thinkers may say they're "thinking critically" or "doing their own research," but they really just look for information that confirms what they already think is true.

   That's why before you try to verify anything online, you should ask yourself three questions:

   First, "What do I already think or believe about this?" Think about whether you're debunking something you think is false or verifying something you believe is true.

   Next, "Why do I want to believe or disprove this?" What are your emotions telling you? What would you gain or lose if it was verified or debunked?

   And finally, "What would make me change my mind?" If the source turned out to be reliable or unreliable? If a reliable fact-checker confirmed or disproved it?

   The most important part of critical thinking is being willing to change your mind based on new information.

132. Now you can take these steps to double-check before you share anything you see online, every time – because only you can break the fake.