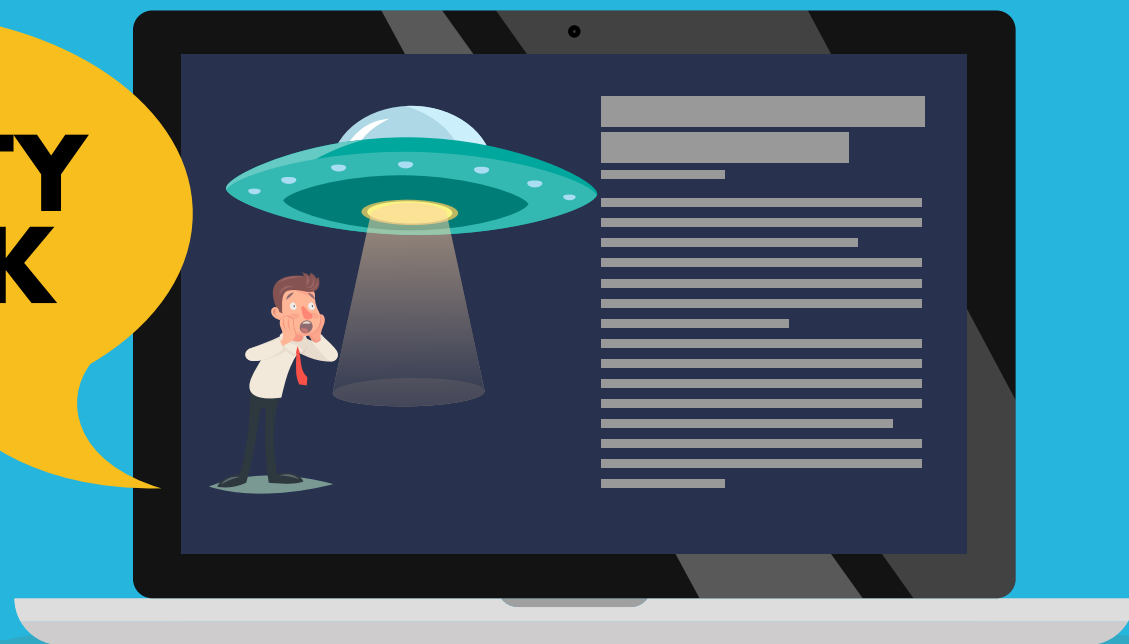




**REALITY
CHECK**



*The internet is like a giant
library that catalogues
millions of new publications
every second.*

*But how do you know if what
you're reading is fiction or
non-fiction?*

How to tell fact from fake online

A Reality Check Guide



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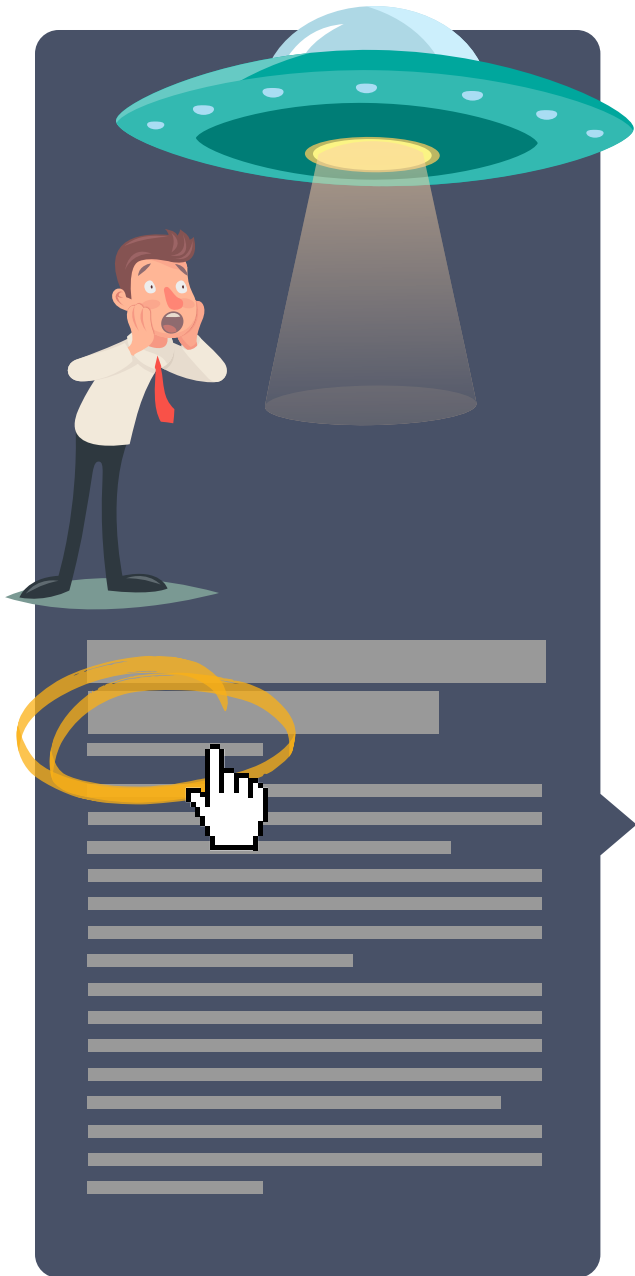
INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, it's because you know it's more important than ever to double-check info that you see online—for your own sake and for other people's.

Most of the tips in this guide will take you a minute or less to do. You'll be surprised how quickly you can fact-check things once you get the hang of it!

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FACT-CHECKING ESSENTIALS

Everyone has a part to play in keeping hoaxes and false news from spreading. Here are five things you can do that will make it easier to sort fact from fiction:

- **Be skeptical, not cynical.** No source is a hundred percent unbiased or reliable, but there are sources that are *mostly* reliable and that work to overcome their own biases.
- **Listen to your gut, but don't trust it.** If your instinct tells you something is or isn't trustworthy, that's a good place to start, but you still need to double-check.
- **Think about *why* you want to believe or disbelieve something.** Pay attention to how something is trying to make you feel. Be especially careful with stories that make you angry or that you really want to believe are true.
- **Go to the *original* source before fact-checking.** We're more likely to trust information if it comes from someone we trust, like a friend or a relative, but it's hard to know if something is true or not until you find out where it *first* came from. Check bylines and follow hyperlinks until you get to the original source.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** Before doing your own fact-checking, see if someone else already has verified the information. Hoax-busting sites like snopes.com or factscan.ca can save you a lot of time.



FACT-CHECKING ESSENTIALS (Cont'd)

1. DO THIS: Be a search engine pro!

HOW? Search engines don't give you the most reliable or accurate results first. Instead, the top results (after the ads) are the ones they think are most *relevant* to you.

Smart Tip: If you go looking for a particular answer, the search engine will give it to you:

Why is the moon made of green cheese?

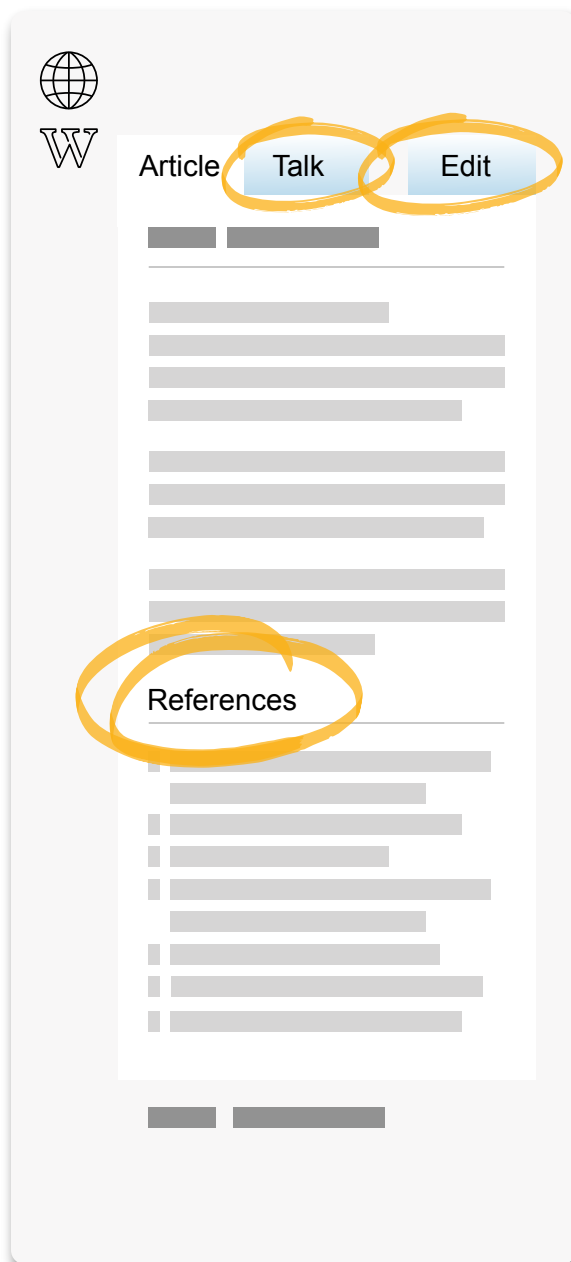
Instead of trying to prove or disprove something, search for general topics:

moon made of

You can also try searching twice, with two different sets of search terms, to see how the results are different.

Most search engines let you organize your search by date, so you can see just the most recent results or sort them from oldest to newest.





FACT-CHECKING ESSENTIALS (Cont'd)

2. DO THIS: Use Wikipedia—wisely!

HOW? Wikipedia is an essential tool for fact-checking. Any time you want to see if a source is reliable, find out if a source is seen as biased in one way or another, or get a general overview of a topic, you can look it up at the Wikipedia site or just add the word “Wikipedia” to a search.

Smart Tip: To find out if a Wikipedia article is reliable, click on the Talk tab to see the article’s rating. If you want to see if the article has been changed recently, click on the Edit tab.

To double-check a particular fact in an article, follow the footnotes down to the References section and see the source.

3. DO THIS: Check before sharing information!

HOW? It’s important to remember that social media is not a source of information, but a link to sources. Follow links back to the original source before deciding whether to believe them or not.



CHECKING DIFFERENT TYPES OF INFORMATION:

Checking online news

News is one of the hardest things to verify.

Most of us get our news from social media, where reliable and accurate news stories online are mixed in with false reports someone spread for commercial or malicious reasons and satirical stories that people think are true.

When a big news story breaks, there's sometimes a lot of confusion early on before the real details come out.





Checking online news (cont'd)

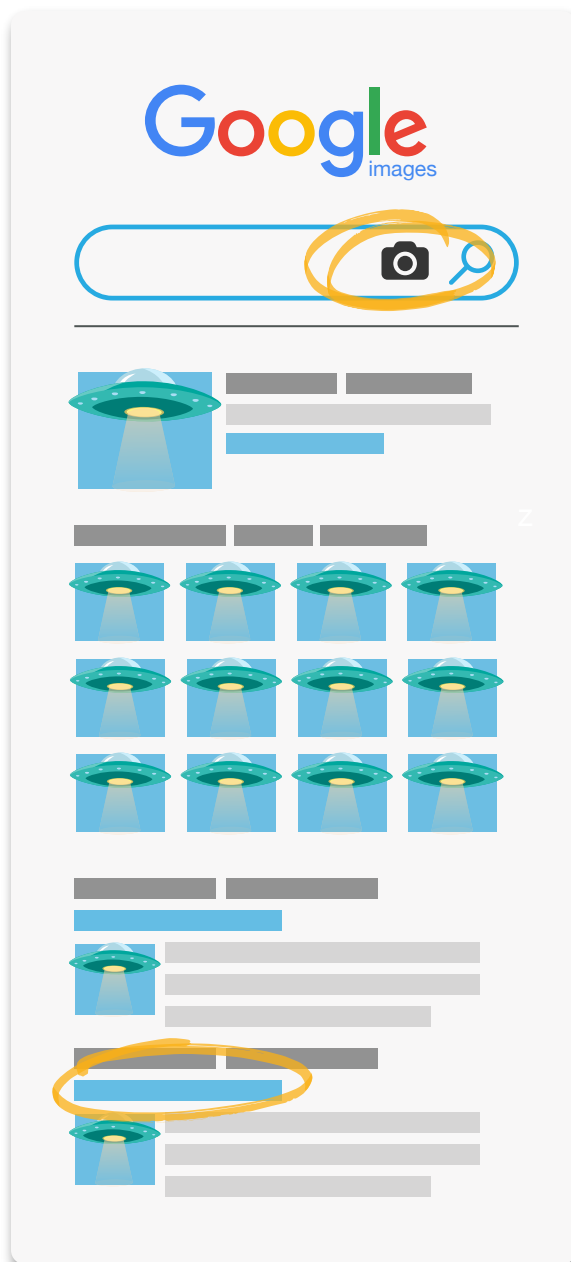
Here are three things you can do quickly to help make you a savvy reader and sharer of online news:

1. DO THIS: Find the original source!

HOW? Look for references or names in the report and do a **News search** for those. Sort your search by date, click on the earliest link and see if you recognize the source. If not, do a search on the source to see if people generally think it's reliable.

Reliable sources show you *why* you should trust them by correcting their mistakes, by keeping news and opinion separate, and by showing you how they make sure the things they publish are true.

Smart Tip: Many Canadian news outlets belong to the **National NewsMedia Council**. Members of the Council agree to a code of ethics. You can make complaints and see if anyone else has complained about a news story at the Council website.



Checking online news (cont'd)

2. DO THIS: Double-check photos and videos.

HOW? First, check on hoax-busting sites like Snopes to see if someone's already verified the photo or video.

If not, you can do a *reverse image search* by right-clicking on an 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.

3. DO THIS: Check against reliable sources.

HOW? Thanks to the internet, it's easy to do a News search on Google or other search engines to see if other sources that you know are reliable are covering the same story. Do they give the same basic details?





Checking important political issues

Being well-informed—and being careful to only share good information—are essential parts of being a citizen. It's important to think before you share political information with family and friends, especially during an election.

Here are three things you can do quickly to help make sure you have good information about important issues:

1. DO THIS: Learn to tell news from opinion.

HOW? News outlets have different standards for “news” and “opinion” pieces. If you get info from an opinion piece, make sure to find a news article on the topic from a reliable source so you can double-check it.





Checking important political issues (cont'd)

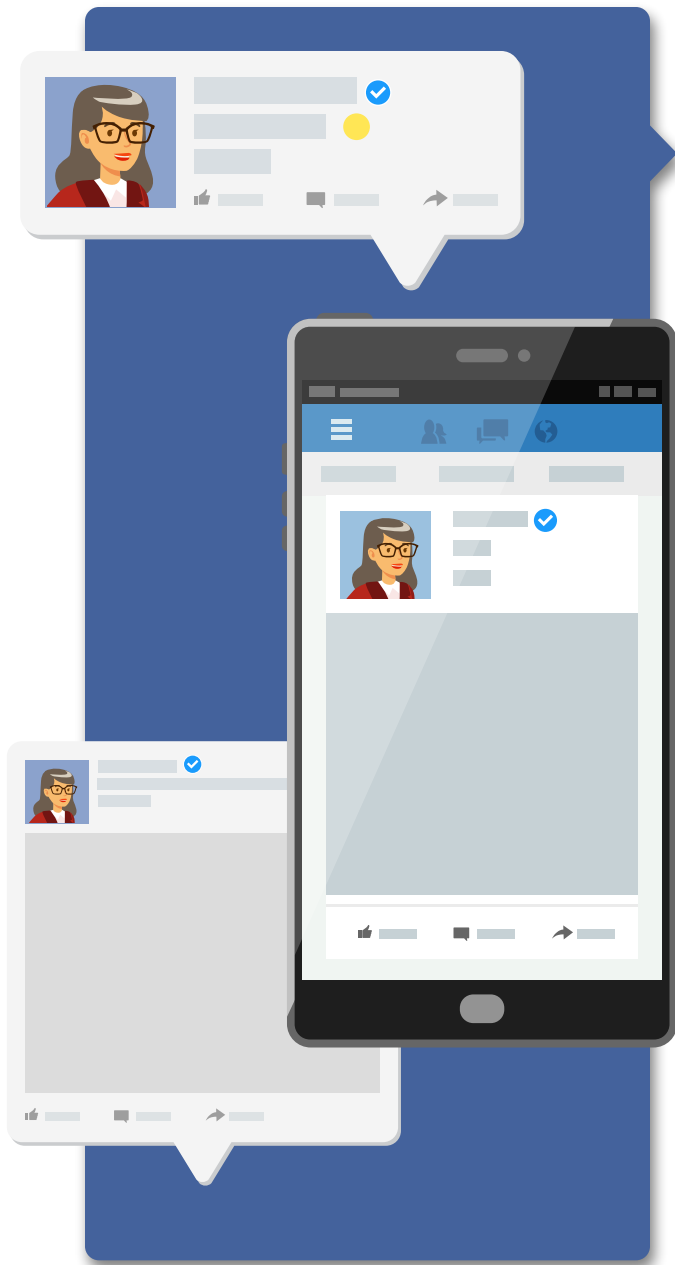
2. DO THIS: Check against other sources.

HOW? Don't rely on just one source of political info. Most search engines and social networks try to give you info they think you'll want to see, so sometimes it helps to use different search engines or news sites that make a point of giving you different sides of a story.

You can read newspapers from all over Canada at:

<https://www.ibiblio.org/slanews/internet/canpapers.html>





Checking important political issues (cont'd)

3. DO THIS: Go to the source.

HOW? To find out a politician's position on an issue, you can go straight to their website. If you read something a politician said on social media, double-check to make sure it's *really* them and not a parody account. On Twitter, the real account will usually have a "Verified" check mark.

During elections, Twitter and other social networks usually identify official candidate accounts too.





Checking science and health information

Health and science info can have a big effect on our health and on what we think about controversial issues. Because most of us aren't experts on these topics, we rely on people and organizations who are experts for good information. But how do we know who we can count on?





Checking science and health information (cont'd)

Here are three things you can do quickly to help make sure you have good information about health and science topics:

1. DO THIS: Find the consensus.

HOW? Before you verify a health or science claim, you need to know what the *consensus* on the topic is—what most people in the field think is true, and how sure they are about it. A claim that's against consensus isn't necessarily wrong, but it has to make a stronger argument for you to believe it.

Smart Tip: You can also use our specialized search engine bit.ly/science-search which searches eight reliable sources at once, including Canadian Geographic and Scientific American.



Checking science and health information (cont'd)

2. DO THIS: Check credentials.

HOW? If your source is a person, do a search on their name and see what you can find out about them. Are they an expert *on this topic*? (If you don't recognize the name of their specialty, do a search to find out what it is.) If they're an organization, do a search to see if they're generally seen as a reliable source.

Smart Tip: Don't just trust what they say in the "About Us" section: check Wikipedia and follow the references at the bottom of the article to reliable sources.

3. DO THIS: Look for purpose and bias.

HOW? Find out how they are funded and who they are connected with. Be wary if they seem to be trying hard to scare you or to sell you something.



Check before you share

Did you know that about 1 in 4 people have shared a false news story? Thanks to social networks, we're not just consumers of news but broadcasters as well—and our friends and families are counting on us to only share accurate, reliable information.

Here are three tips to make sure you share good information and stop the spread of hoaxes, rumours and scams:

1. DO THIS: Watch out for your own bias.

HOW? Thinking like a fact-checker doesn't mean you don't have a bias, it just means you *know* you have one. Think about the reasons why you might be more likely to believe something. Try to imagine what somebody who disagrees with you would say, and what questions they might ask.



A MediaSmarts Reality Check Guide

Check before you share (cont'd)

2. DO THIS: Wait before you share.

HOW? A lot of false info is designed to make you angry so you'll share it right away. Take at least five minutes to think about whether something is *really* important before you share it.

3. DO THIS: Keep an eye on the big picture.

HOW? If you see someone else spreading false info online, take a minute before responding and ask yourself whether they're actually likely to listen to you.

If you decide to correct what someone else is sharing, make sure to stick to just talking about the issue instead of making it personal.

Don't just debunk what's fake: take the time to replace false info with good facts and show them how you fact-checked the info.



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