



Break the Fake Lesson Plan:  
**Verifying information online**

Grades: 6-9

*Duration:* 1 1/2 hours plus time  
for the evaluation/assessment task





## Overview

In this lesson, students participate in a workshop that teaches them four quick, easy steps to verify online information. After practicing these four steps they create a public service announcement aimed at teaching one of these steps and spreading the message that it is necessary for everyone to fact-check information we see online every time we are going to share it or act on it.

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This project has been made possible  
in part by the Government of Canada.



## Learning Outcomes

### **Students will:**

- Learn simple steps for verifying online information
- Practice verifying online information
- Understand digital literacy key concepts:
  - Digital media are networked
  - Digital media are shareable and persistent
  - Interactions through digital media can have a real impact
  - Digital media experiences are shaped by the tools we use
- Create a media text

### **Preparation and Materials**

Prepare to project the following:

- Break the Fake slideshow
- House Hippo 2.0 PSA video
- House Hippo 2.0 print PSA

Photocopy the following tip sheets:

- *Break the Fake: Use fact-checking resources*
- *Break the Fake: Find the source*
- *Break the Fake: Verify the source*
- *Break the Fake: Check other sources*

Photocopy the following assignment sheets (see note under Procedure below):

- *Make fact-checking a habit*

Students will need access to internet-connected devices.

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





### Procedure

Begin by asking students if any of them have ever been unsure about whether something they saw online was real or not. What (if anything) have they done to find out?

Ask students if they have ever shared anything they weren't sure was true. If so, how did they decide whether or not to share it?

Point out that it isn't just scammers, trolls or spies that make online misinformation a problem: all of us are a part of it when we share things we aren't sure are true. Suggest that they think of verifying online information as a habit like using seatbelts: you have to do it *every time* for it to be effective.

Explain to students that you are going to teach them four steps for verifying (or checking) information, but that they won't have to use all four every time. In fact, most of the time just one or two will be enough to find out whether you

can believe something you see online, and once they've learned them, none of each of the steps will take more than a minute or so to do.

### Use fact-checking resources

Distribute the tip sheet *Break the Fake: Use fact-checking resources* and project slide **17** of the *Break the Fake* workshop. When you get to slide **27**, have them verify the example given, preferably using the connected device they use most often in their regular lives. Tell them to use the tip sheet to help them remember what you've covered.

- If there are not enough connected devices for all students, have some buddy up.
- For younger grades you may choose to do the exercise as a whole-class activity.

When students have had some time to verify the example, ask them what their conclusion was. Show slides **28-32** and see if students got the right answer.





### **Find the source**

Distribute the tip sheet *Break the Fake: Find the source* and project slide **33**. When you get to slide **53**, have them verify the example given, preferably using the connected device they use most often in their regular lives.

When students have had some time to verify the example, ask them what their conclusion was. Show slides **54-56** and see if students got the right answer.

### **Verify the Source**

Distribute the tip sheet *Break the Fake: Verify the source* and project slide **57**. When you get to slide **91**, have them verify the example given,

preferably using the connected device they use most often in their regular lives.

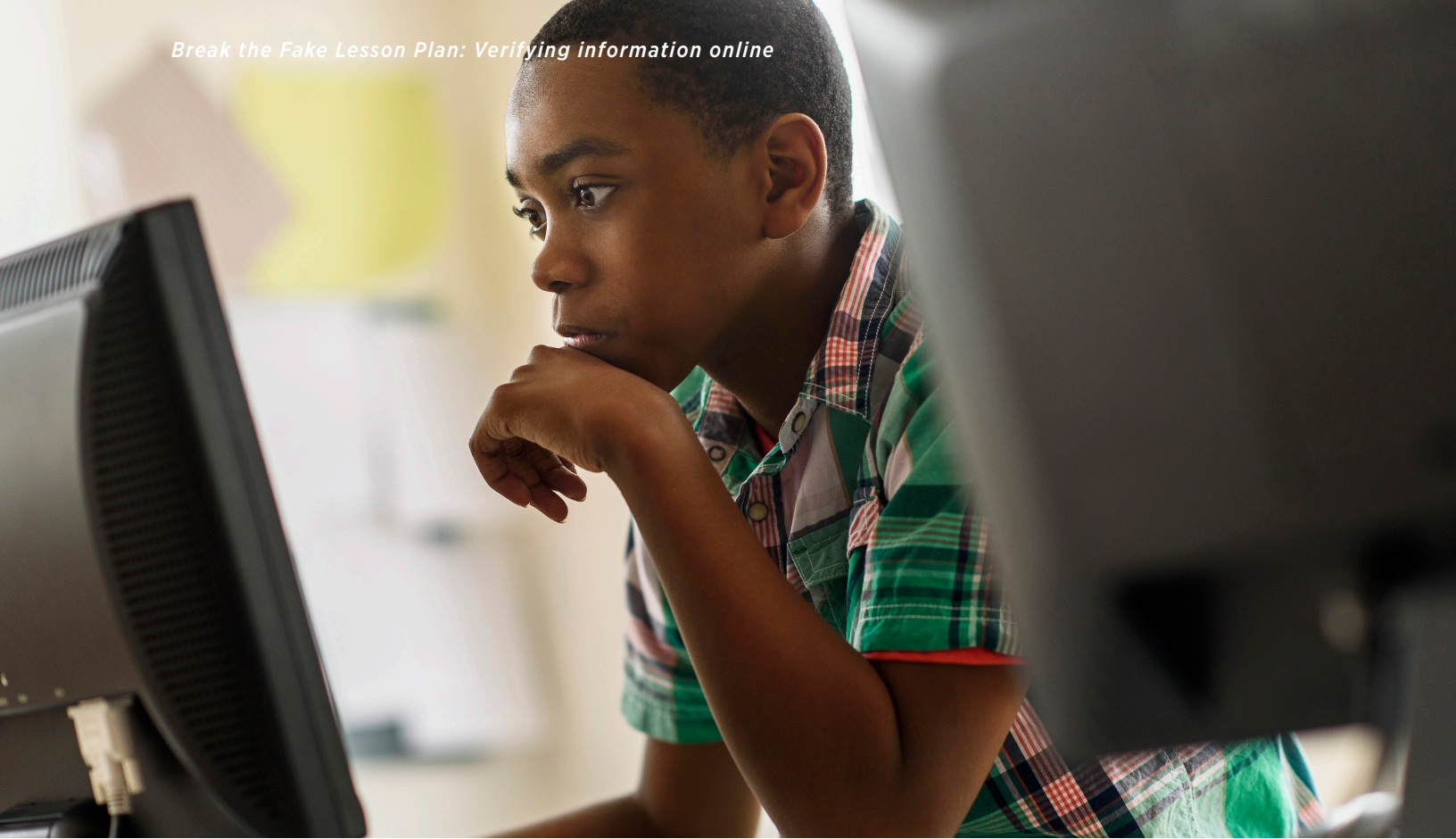
When students have had some time to verify the example, ask them what their conclusion was. Show slides **92-97** and see if students got the right answer.

### **Check other sources**

Distribute the tip sheet *Break the Fake: Check other sources* and project slide **98**. When you get to slide **110**, have them verify the example given, preferably using the connected device they use most often in their regular lives.

When students have had some time to verify the example, ask them what their conclusion was. Show slides **111-115** and see if students got the right answer.





### Final Exercise

Project slides [116-117](#) and have students verify the two examples using whichever step they feel is most likely to get them a quick answer. When they've had a few minutes to do so, have them share what they found and what they did to find it.

Now project slides [118-121](#) and see if students got to the right answer.

### See One, Do One, Teach One

Explain to students that it's not enough for *them* to have learned to make fact-checking a habit: because all of us have a role in whether or not misinformation spreads, they have to teach others how to do it as well.

Explain to students that it is possible to change a whole society's mind about things: you can give examples such as drinking and driving, and smoking, which both became much less common and viewed more negatively in a fairly short

time, as well as wearing seatbelts and keeping cats indoors, which both became more common. Sometimes these changes in social norms happen on their own, sometimes they're caused by media portrayals (including advertising), and sometimes they happen in part because of deliberate *public service campaigns* aimed at changing people's attitudes.

Explain to the class that a good PSA does three things: it makes readers aware of the issue, gives them a reason to care about the issue, and gives them useful information to help them address the issue. Print PSAs can use both text and images to do these things.

Show students the [House Hippo 2.0](#) video and print PSA (to come). Discuss with the class:

- What issue is the PSA about? (The need to double-check everything you see online.)





- How does it make the reader care about the issue? (Shows you how easy it is to be fooled by what you see.)
- How does it inform the reader about how to address the issue? (It directs them to the Break the Fake campaign website for more information.)
- Skit or live video
- Stop-motion animation (see the MediaSmarts lesson [Getting the Toothpaste Back into the Tube](#) for more information)
- Common Craft-style cutout animation video (see the MediaSmarts lesson [Online Relationships: Respect and Consent](#) for more information)
- A meme, using the [School Safe Meme Generator](#) ([bit.ly/schoolsafememes](http://bit.ly/schoolsafememes))

Divide students into eight groups, with two groups responsible for each of the four fact-checking steps the students have learned. (If this makes for groups that are too small to be practical, split them into four groups instead.)

Distribute the assignment sheet *Make fact-checking a habit* and have each group create a print public service announcement that will teach their fact-checking step and also encourage those who see it to make a habit of fact-checking.

Alternately, depending on the course you're teaching and what media production work students have already done, you may have them create a different type of media product (or let them choose) from the following list:

Have students present their PSAs to the class, explaining the audience they chose and the choices they made to target their PSA to that audience.

# TIP SHEET #1:

## Use fact-checking tools



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

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



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

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

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

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

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



## TIP SHEET #2: *Find the source*



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

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

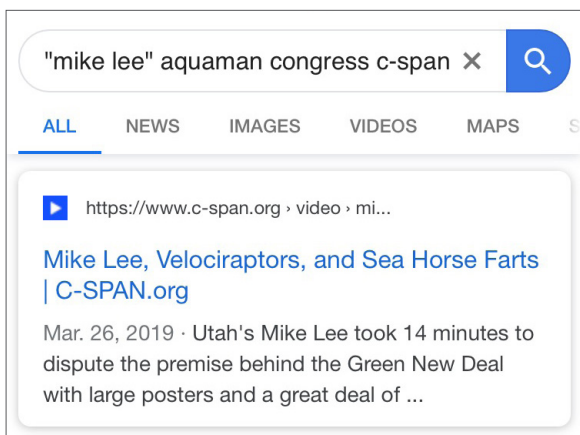
On a website, follow links that lead back to the source. Look for phrases like "According to" a source, a source "reported" or the word "Source" at the top or bottom of a story. Like in this example below – **click on highlighted words "Associated Press"**:



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

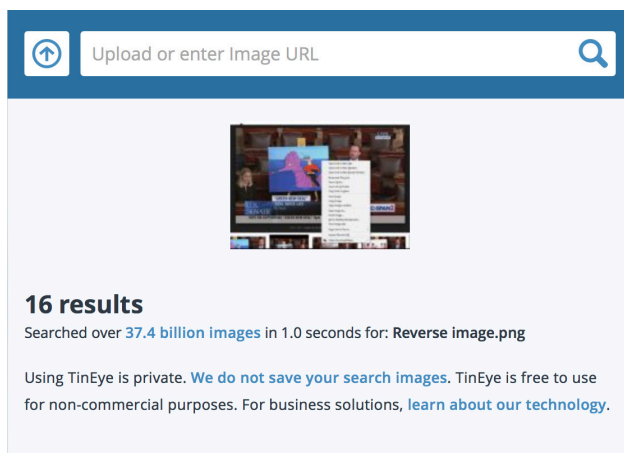
*Make sure to keep going until you're sure you're  
at the original!*

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



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

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



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

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

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



# TIP SHEET #3:

## Verify the source



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

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

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

### 1. Do they *really* exist?

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

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

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

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



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



Statistics canada twitter account

[All](#) [News](#) [Images](#) [Maps](#) [Videos](#) [More](#)

About 521,000,000 results (0.76 seconds)

**Statistics Canada (@StatCan\_eng) · Twitter**

[https://twitter.com/StatCan\\_eng](https://twitter.com/StatCan_eng) 

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

### 3. Are they trustworthy?

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

**The Washington Post** (sometimes abbreviated as **WaPo**) is a major American **daily newspaper** published in **Washington, D.C.**, with a particular emphasis on **national politics** and the **federal government**. It has the largest circulation in the **Washington metropolitan area**. Its slogan "Democracy Dies in Darkness" began appearing on its **masthead** in 2017.<sup>[6]</sup> 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.<sup>[7]</sup> *Post* journalists have also received **18 Nieman Fellowships** and 368 White House News Photographers Association awards. In the early 1970s, in the best-known episode in the newspaper's history, reporters **Bob Woodward** and **Carl Bernstein** led the American press's investigation into

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

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










## TIP SHEET #4:

### Check other sources



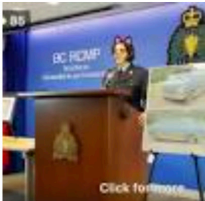
This step may sometimes be the last one you do, but it could also be the first. The News tab is better than the main Google search for this step because it only shows real news sources. While not every source that's included is perfectly reliable, they are all news outlets that really exist. Here is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



 All  Images  Videos  **News**  Shopping  More Settings Tools

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About 8,620 results (0.68 seconds)



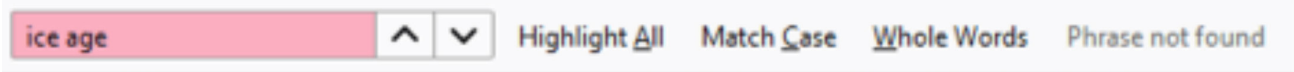
**Canadian police embarrassed after **cat filter** used on Facebook video ...**  
**Express.co.uk** - Jul. 23, 2019  
Last month, the **cat filter** was also used during a **Pakistani politician's** press conference. Shaukat Yousafzai was updating journalists on ...

- 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

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

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

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

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



## TIP SHEET:

# How to tell what's true online



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

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

### Use fact-checking tools

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

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

### Find the sources

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

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

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## Verify the source

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

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

### 1. Do they *really* exist?

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

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

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

### 3. Are they *trustworthy*?

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

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

## Check other sources

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

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

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



## Make fact-checking a habit

For this assignment you will be creating a PSA (public service announcement) message to promote the message that people should not share anything online unless they're sure that it's accurate and not misleading. Your PSA will also show your audience how to do the *one step* your group has been assigned.

Decide who your PSA is aimed at:

- People younger than you?
- People your age?
- Young people (teenagers or young adults) older than you?
- Adults (your parents and relatives)?
- Seniors (your grandparents or older relatives)?
- Another group you choose?

Keep your audience in mind as you design your PSA.

Remember that your PSA should:

- Show your audience that they need to fact-check information every time they are going to share something they see online
- Make your audience understand that what *they* do about online information affects *everyone*
- Explain the step your group has been assigned in a way that your audience will understand.

# Task Assessment Rubric: Make fact-checking a habit

	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p><b>Use</b></p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing</p>	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i></p> <p>determine criteria for rating informational websites and apply them to an assigned site and understands that all websites are not equally good sources of information</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i></p> <p>advocates and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology</p> <p>uses digital media to be part of a community</p> <p>exhibits leadership as a digital citizen</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i></p> <p>communicates information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p><b>Understand</b></p> <p>“Understand” includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>“Understand” also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating, and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate, and solve problems.</p>	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i></p> <p>demonstrates understanding that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy</p> <p>judges the validity of content found on the Internet, how to find appropriate material, and what sources can be trusted</p> <p>compares, contrasts, and synthesizes information from diverse sources before it is used in a knowledge-making process</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i></p> <p>demonstrates understanding what it means to be responsible to and respectful of his/her offline and online communities as a way to learn how to be a good digital citizen</p> <p>understands how meaning is produced through multimedia (text, images, audio, video) and how culture is produced through the Internet and social media in particular</p> <p><i>Creating and Remixing:</i></p> <p>communicates information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats</p> <p>identifies conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create</p> <p>shows an understanding of the forms and techniques of the medium and genre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the chosen topic, issue and solution were clear</li> <li>• the product displayed an insight into a topic</li> </ul>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p><b>Create</b></p> <p>Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i> applies existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes using digital technology</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i> collaborates with others to outline common expectations in order to build a strong digital citizenship community makes valuable contributions to the public knowledge domain (e.g. wikis, public forums, reviews)</p> <p><i>Creating and Remixing:</i> effectively applies the forms and techniques of the medium and genre</p> <p>creates original works as a means of personal or group expression</p> <p>produces media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques</p>	<p>Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)</p>