



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 9 to 12
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Duration:	1 ½ to 2 hours, plus time for the assessment/evaluation activity
This lesson is part of the Reality Check lesson series.	

Reality Check: Authentication 101



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

Overview

In this lesson, students consider the different factors that make online sources reliable or unreliable. They then learn quick steps they can take to gauge an online source's reliability and practice these steps by playing an interactive online game. Finally, students create a media product to teach other students how to do one of the tactics they've learned.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Understand aspects of digital media that make verification challenging
- Learn and practice authentication tools
- Develop online authentication as a habit
- Create a media text

Preparation and Materials

Photocopy the handout *5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Find out if a Story is For Real (in Under Five Minutes)* and the assignment sheet *DIY Fact Checking*.

Make sure students have Internet access and are able to connect to *Reality Check Mission Four: Authentication 101* (<http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/games/reality-check/index.html/>).

Procedure

Start by asking students how many of them use Wikipedia for research. Ask how many of them have been told by teachers, parents or people to be wary of Wikipedia as a source of information. Then ask *why* you should be skeptical of Wikipedia as a source. (*The most likely answers: "Anyone can post things there," "Anyone can edit the articles there," or "The articles aren't written by experts."*)



Point out that all of those points are true of the whole Internet: anyone can post content online and make it look believable; anyone can register an unused web address, so sources you've used in the past might become unreliable or disappear altogether; and it can be hard to tell the identity or authority of people or organizations online. Explain that in many ways Wikipedia is actually *more* reliable because it is *transparent*: if you click on Edit History you can see what's been changed and by whom.

On a blackboard, digital whiteboard or sheet of chart paper, write the heading *Wikipedia* and the following items below:

- Authorship: (*How clear is it who wrote the content?*)
- Authority: (*How sure can you be that whoever wrote the content knows what they're talking about?*)
- Provenance: (*Can you tell where the information came from?*)
- Commercial considerations: (*Does the source mostly exist to be educational, or to make money?*)
- Filtering: (*How sure are you that you're getting all of the available information?*)

Now go through each heading and discuss how Wikipedia scores for each one.

1. Authorship: (*Mixed. The author of each edit is recorded, but some are anonymous and others pseudonymous. It is possible to track the IP address of editors, so you know [for example] if a politician's staffers edited the article on that politician.*)
2. Authority: (*Mixed. To receive a high [rating](#) a Wikipedia article must be based on authoritative sources, but lower-rated articles are still available.*)
3. Provenance: (*Mixed. To receive a high [rating](#) a Wikipedia article must provide sources for all information, but lower-rated articles are still available.*)
4. Commercial considerations: (*Wikipedia is a non-profit, does not charge for access and does not accept advertising.*)
5. Filtering: (*Wikipedia does not use algorithmic filtering: each article looks the same to every user. Tell students that you can test to see if a source is filtered in this way by having two people see if they get the same content, or seeing if you get the same content in regular and Private or Incognito mode.*)

Divide the class into pairs or small groups and have them do research to answer the same questions about the following sources:

- Google News (<https://news.google.com/>)
- Encyclopedia Britannica (<https://www.britannica.com/>)
- Trending on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/feed/trending>) (*make sure that students have enabled Restricted Mode before accessing YouTube to limit the risk of exposing them to inappropriate content. To do this, open settings on the YouTube homepage and toggle Restricted Mode to On.*)
- Upworthy (<https://www.upworthy.com/>)
- Toronto Star (<https://www.thestar.com/>)
- Newser (<http://www.newser.com/>)
- News360 (<https://news360.com/home>)
- Associated Press (<https://apnews.com/>)



Have groups share their findings. Make sure to point out that Google News, Upworthy and YouTube are *algorithmically filtered* (different users will see different content), that most Newser articles are attributed just to “Newser staff,” that Google News, Upworthy and Newser allow you to check the provenance of articles by following links, that the Associated Press and Toronto Star both have procedures to make sure their sources are authoritative, and that nearly all of the sources make money from advertising.

Now point out to students that there are thousands (if not millions) of online sources of information, and in many cases not everything on the same source will be equally reliable (for example, different Wikipedia articles have different ratings; a Google search may bring you a mix of more or less reliable sources; what is “trending” on YouTube may have no connection to what is reliable (or even real).

Distribute the handout *5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Find out if a Story is For Real (in Under Five Minutes)* and go through it with the class.

Have students use the handout to help them complete [Reality Check Mission Four: Authentication 101](#). At your discretion you may have students complete it individually, in pairs, as a whole class or as homework.

When students have completed the game, ask them:

- What was the correct rating, and what action went with it? (Probably True/Avoid eating at Palapa del Taco.) How close were they to it?
- What were some clues that led them to their decision?
The most important clue was that the original source of the story, The Bytown Herald, was a reliable source – but the story there wasn’t exactly the same as the one at Weird But True.
- What were some that might have been misleading?
There were definitely some reasons to be skeptical: the source the story appeared in didn’t have a good track record, it used a stock graphic instead of a real photo, and overall the story seemed “too good to be true”.
- Why was it better not to share or debunk this story?
You couldn’t debunk the story because the facts in it were true, but at the same time the overall message of the Weird But True article was too misleading to share it.

Evaluation: DIY Fact-Checking

Distribute the assignment sheet *DIY Fact-Checking* and go through it with the class. If you wish, you may have students share their media products with the class or the rest of the school community.



DIY Fact-Checking

For this assignment, you will pick one of the tips or tools you have learned during this lesson (from the *5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Find out if a Story is For Real (in Under Five Minutes)* handout, from the *Reality Check* game, or from classroom activities) and create a media product that will show other people when, how and why to use it. Your product should be *clear*, *specific* and *practical*.

What kind of media product you choose is up to you; the only limit is that it *cannot* be all or mostly text (like a tip sheet).

Here are some examples of possible media products:

- An “explainer” video (animated or live-action)
- A poster
- A comic strip
- A meme



Assessment Task Rubric

	Learning Expectations	Achievement
Use	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i> applies digital tools to gather, evaluate and use information</p> <p>locates, organizes, analyzes, evaluates, synthesizes and ethically uses information from a variety of sources and media</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness:</i> understands the technologies he/she is using at a level that is sufficient to underpin good decisions</p>	Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)
Understand	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i> demonstrates understanding that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy</p> <p>compares, contrasts and synthesizes information from diverse sources (triangulates information) before it is used in a knowledge-making process</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness:</i> understands the ways websites and companies collect data online and utilize it to personalize content for their users, as well as considering companies' motives in doing so</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i> 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>	Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)

	Learning Expectations	Achievement
Engage	<p><i>Making and Remixing</i></p> <p>exhibits leadership as a digital citizen</p> <p>communicates information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness:</i></p> <p>uses digital technology to promote awareness of consumer rights and redress mechanisms</p> <p>uses digital technology to promote awareness of consumer rights and redress mechanisms</p> <p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i></p> <p>uses digital technology to identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation</p> <p>understands how meaning is produced through the news media (text, images, audio, video) and how culture is produced through the news</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

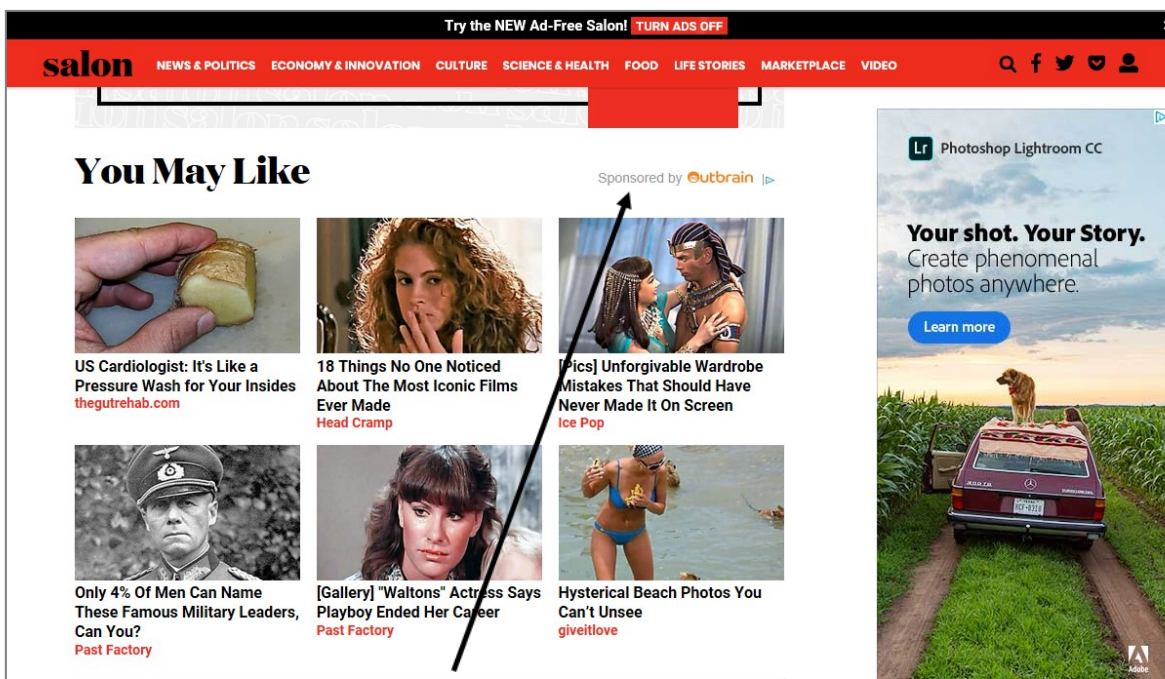
5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Find out if a Story is For Real (in Under Five Minutes)

Checking online info doesn't have to be hard, and it doesn't have to take a long time – but you do have to do it every time you want to share something, or you might make a decision based on it.

It's not always easy to tell whether something online is a reliable source of information, a parody, an ad, or a fake that's actually trying to fool you.

Here are five things you can do in less than five minutes to make sure a story is for real. (Most will take you less than two minutes!)

1. Make sure you're looking at the original source of the story (look for links or phrases like "the *Globe and Mail* reports"). When you're sure, open a new tab or window and do a search on the source: are they generally considered to be a reliable source of information? Is the web address you're looking at the right one? Some satirical sites like *The Onion* and *The Beaverton* look like news if you don't look carefully, and it's easy to create fake versions of real news websites or even make websites for news sources that don't exist.
2. Look for the "Sponsored" or "Ad" tag. On some news sites it's not easy to tell the difference between news articles produced by the site, sponsored stories that other people have paid them to link to, and ads. (Sometimes all three use the same fonts and colours.) Anything that the site was paid for, though, should have the word "Sponsored" or "Ad" visible. (Hovering over the link with your pointer is useful, too: if the web address doesn't match the site you're on, you're being taken to another site.)



Which of these are ads? All of them.



3. Check to see if different sources are giving basically the same details of the story. Sometimes sources will cover a story that's really happening, but not give you the full picture. Do a news search (click the "News" tab on Google) for the names of important people or places in the story and see what other sources are saying. (There are times when only a single news source has a "scoop," but it's better for you to wait until a few different reliable sources are covering it.)
 - Remember, search engines *don't* sort results by how accurate or reliable they are – so when you search, don't just click the first result. Scan the "snippets" (the sample text for each result) and the links to see which look the most useful.
 - Many search engines also personalize your results based on the profile they have of you. To get more neutral results, use more than one search engine or use a non-tracking search engine like DuckDuckGo.
4. Check a fact-checking site. Sites like Snopes can be a great shortcut to find out if a story has already been debunked – or if a too-good-to-be-true story really was true after all. (Just remember that if there's no article about a story at all, that doesn't mean it's true, just that the site hasn't covered it yet.)
 - Like any other source, you can't just take someone's word that they're a reliable fact-checker! Make sure they've agreed to the International Fact Checking Network's Code of Principles: <https://ifncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/> (Click on the "Signatories" tag at the top to find fact-checkers, or to see if a fact-checker has agreed to the Code or Principles.)
 - If there is an article, take a second to look at *why* the site gave the story that rating. A lot of times it's more complicated than just "true" or "false."
5. When you see stories being passed around on social media, watch out for people sharing screenshots of earlier posts instead of directly sharing them (such as by retweeting). It's easy to make fake tweets or Facebook posts, so you should be suspicious if there's no way to track it back to the original post. If you want to double check it, do a search for the text of the post or the general topic (so if someone shares a tweet of the Pope saying he loves poutine, you could search "Pope poutine tweet".)

