

How to know what to trust

FIRST

1. Be aware of your emotions.

2. Pause.

3. Decide if it is...

NEXT

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Check the comments.

Has anyone provided evidence that the claim being made isn't true (or that it *is* true)?

Read the post carefully.

Does it cite reputable sources or actual evidence to support its claim? (Remember: Bad actors often try to pass off unrelated photos and video as "evidence" for their false claims.)

Search elsewhere for the claim.

Does it appear in other user-generated forums? Have other accounts shared identical posts? Have quality news outlets or fact-checking organizations written about this?

Investigate the source.

Can you tell where this claim originated? If not, how reliable are other posts shared by this account? Does the account seem responsibly run, or is it devoted to amplifying divisive, inflammatory content?

AN UNFAMILIAR ORGANIZATION/SOURCE

Check the comments.

Has anyone flagged this source or provided evidence that the claim being made isn't true (or that it *is* true)?

Turn the headline into a question, then search.

Copy the headline into a search bar, adding a question mark at the end. Have reputable news outlets or fact-checking organizations written about this?

Search for the name of the source.

Are there credible results that identify it as unreliable? Can you determine if it is a satirical or entertainment site? Is there evidence that it is a state-run news outlet?

Analyze the source.

Does the website include disclaimers that its content is not to be taken seriously? Do other items on the site look suspicious? Does the site contain original reporting, or simply commentary? Are there numerous grammatical and/or spelling errors?

A RECOGNIZED STANDARDS-BASED NEWS SOURCE

Check: News or something else?

Is this a straight news report or something else, such as an opinion piece? (Remember: Opinion journalism doesn't try to be unbiased.)

Look for obvious problems.

Is there anything in this report that seems "off" to you? Does it use loaded language, or contain other signs that it's unfair?

Look for other coverage.

Are other credible standards-based outlets reporting the same thing?

Evaluate the reporting.

Are the people, documents and other sources cited in the report generally considered reliable? Have the details been clearly verified, or is the story still developing?

4. Take 60 seconds to...

5. One more minute to...

ON AN ONGOING BASIS

USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Follow fact-checkers.

Add fact-checking organizations (see several below) to your social media feeds to help you identify misinformation patterns.

Learn best practices.

Don't share memes or other posts if you're not sure that they are true; doing so only amplifies misinformation. Don't share links unless you have checked them out yourself.

Help others.

Question the legitimacy of suspicious posts from accounts you follow; provide links to fact checks in comments; talk to friends and family about their information habits.

AN UNFAMILIAR ORGANIZATION/SOURCE

Look for transparency.

Is this source up front about who owns and runs it? Does it correct errors? Does it request and publish letters to the editor? Is it clear who is creating articles or posts?

Take note of unreliable sources.

If an account repeatedly posts misleading or false information, avoid it.

A RECOGNIZED STANDARDS-BASED NEWS SOURCE

Learn the standards.

Quality journalism is guided by aspirational standards (for example, the Society of Professional Journalists' [Code of Ethics](#)) that can help you recognize good reporting.

Develop a critical eye.

Follow experts who frequently discuss journalism issues and critique news coverage.

6. Build savvy habits.

OVER TIME

Learn digital verification skills.

Use widely available free resources online to teach yourself how to do reverse image searches, use geolocation tools (like [Google Street View](#)), search for archived webpages and use critical observation skills to do your own fact-checking.

Help protect others.

False and misleading information seeks to exploit its audience. Warn others about sources that publish such content.

Dive into the field of journalism.

Seek out reputable journalism organizations, subscribe to industry newsletters, listen to journalism podcasts, and read books and articles about the ways that journalism is changing.

7. Deepen your expertise.

REMEMBER:

Guard your emotions.

Misinformation often seeks to exploit our most deeply held values and beliefs to generate outrage and anger. Don't fall for this trick.

Watch for false evidence and fabrications.

Purveyors of misinformation use a variety of tactics. The most common include presenting photos and videos out of context, making crude alterations to photos and documents, and fabricating quotes and social media posts for public figures.

RESOURCES

Visit the News Literacy Project's [website](#), and follow NLP on social media (@NewsLitProject).

Subscribe to NLP's weekly email newsletter, [The Sift](#)®.

Check out reputable fact-checking organizations, such as [PolitiFact](#), [FactCheck.org](#), [Snopes](#), [Truth or Fiction](#), [Lead Stories](#) and [AFP Fact Check](#).

Learn about organizations that train and support journalists, such as the [Poynter Institute](#), [First Draft](#), the [News Leaders Association](#) and the [Society of Professional Journalists](#).