

How can I verify information online?

June 2025



Evaluating Information

An essential 21st century skill is learning how to distinguish information that is reliable from disinformation, misinformation and fake news.

Information literacy requires an understanding of the media landscape and knowledge about how to use our critical thinking skills in this landscape.

If we understand a little about how to verify information, it helps us analyze and evaluate the media we are consuming and interacting with.



Misinformation, disinformation and fake news

Disinformation is information that is false or distorts reality. It is transmitted by means of mass media or social media. Its aim is to manipulate public opinion.

Fake news is a publication that has the same structure as a news article, but contains exaggerated, distorted or false information. Fake news is a form of disinformation.

Misinformation is information transmitted by mass media or social media that is considered to be truthful by the transmitter, but, in reality, distorts facts or is wrong.

Read more here: [What is disinformation? \(activities to do with learners\)](#)



Curriculum Resource

How can we verify the information we see online and make sure we are not spreading misinformation?

One place to find lessons to help us learn the skills and knowledge we need is [MediaSmarts](https://mediasmarts.ca).

MediaSmarts is Canada's bilingual centre for digital media literacy. MediaSmarts has been conducting research, developing resources and advancing digital media literacy since 1996.



Canada's Centre
for Digital Media
Literacy





MediaSmarts

- Aims to advance digital media literacy through research, education, public engagement and outreach.
- Defines digital media literacy as the ability to critically, effectively and responsibly access, use, understand and engage with media of all kinds.
- Focuses on K-12 teachers and parents.



Canada's Centre
for Digital Media
Literacy

Teacher Resources

- A variety of topics covered: authenticating information, cyber security, digital citizenship, etc.
- A variety of resource types: games, lesson plans, tip sheets.
- Free access to the resources with no account required.

[Find lessons and resources](#)



Canada's Centre
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Literacy



Break the Fake

In this recent report, MediaSmarts surveyed 5,000 people and found that most participants struggled to distinguish between true and false information.

[Motives and Methods: Building Resilience to Online Misinformation in Canada](#)

In the next pages we are going to explore part of a MediaSmarts lesson called [Break the Fake: Verifying Information Online](#) to help us build our resilience to online misinformation.

In this lesson, participants will:

- Learn simple steps for verifying online information
- Practice verifying online information
- Understand digital literacy key concepts
- Create a media text



Skill and Knowledge

Skills required for this lesson:

- Using a browser
- Using a search engine
- Browsing the results in a search engine
- Copy, pasting and saving images
- Uploading files



Put your learner hat on!

Definitions

Disinformation:

False information shared through mass media or social media with the intent **to deceive people.**

Misinformation:

Spreading false, or inaccurate information **that is believed to be true by the sender.**

Question

Have you ever shared
information that you were not
sure was true?

Create a habit

It's not just scammers who
spread false information,
it can be any of us.

Verifying information
has to become a habit
like putting a seatbelt on.

4 steps to checking information

1. Use fact-checking tools
2. Find the source
3. Verify the source
4. Check other sources

Watch this video: Use fact checking tools



[Using Fact Checking Tools Video](#)

Videos on this page: [Break the Fake: How to tell what's true online](#)

1. Use fact-checking tools

What is a fact-checker?

- Someone, often a journalist, who specializes in verifying doubtful information
- Some websites specialize in presenting stories that have been fact-checked.

Some fact-checking tools

1. MediaSmarts [Fact Checker](#)
2. [AFP Fact Check](#)
3. [Snopes](#)

Fact-checking: Is this story true?



Yup That Exists
@yup.that.exists

Fast food chain Wendy's unveiled their new 'Emo Wendy' logo at a location in London, UK.



Wendy's logo



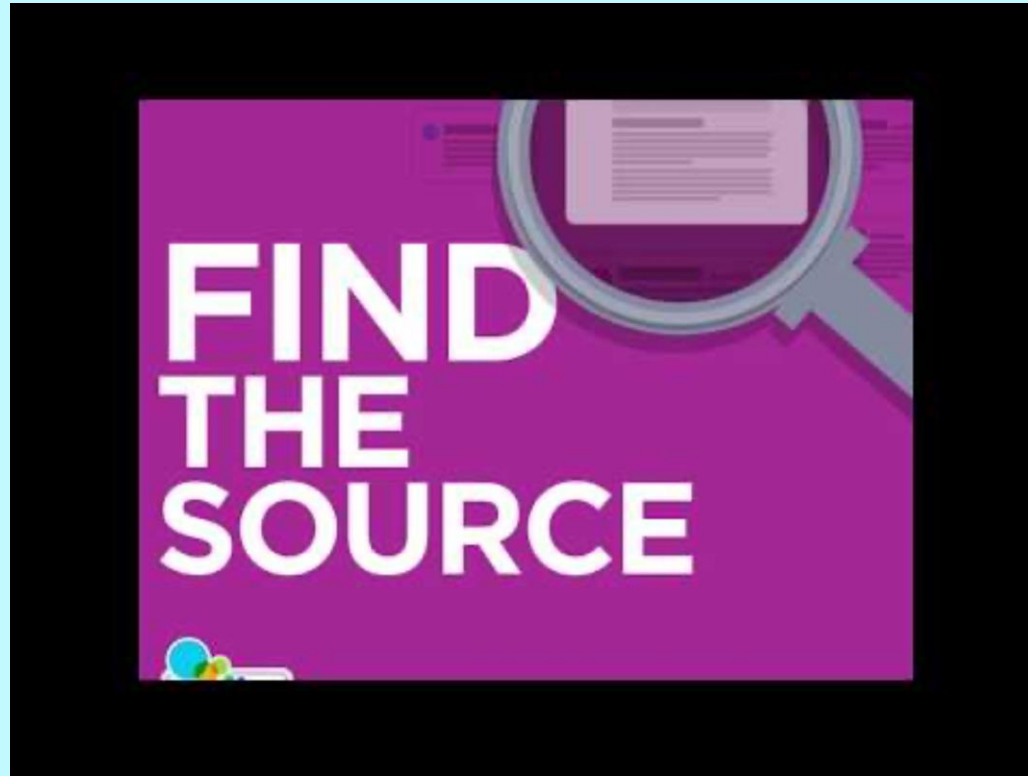
Emo is short for emotional.

The term came from the punk rock scene of the 1980s and was used to describe the music and fashion associated with that subculture. Emo music is characterized by its emotional lyrics and introspective themes.

If you do not find anything on your story

1. It doesn't mean that it's true
2. Move to the next fact-checking step

Watch this video: Find the source



[Find the Source Video](#)

Videos on this page: [Break the Fake: How to tell what's true online](#)

2. Find the source

Before sharing information, find out where it originally came from:

- On a social media post, see if the sources are linked in the post or the description
- On a website, look for “**According to**”, “**reported by**” or “**Source**”

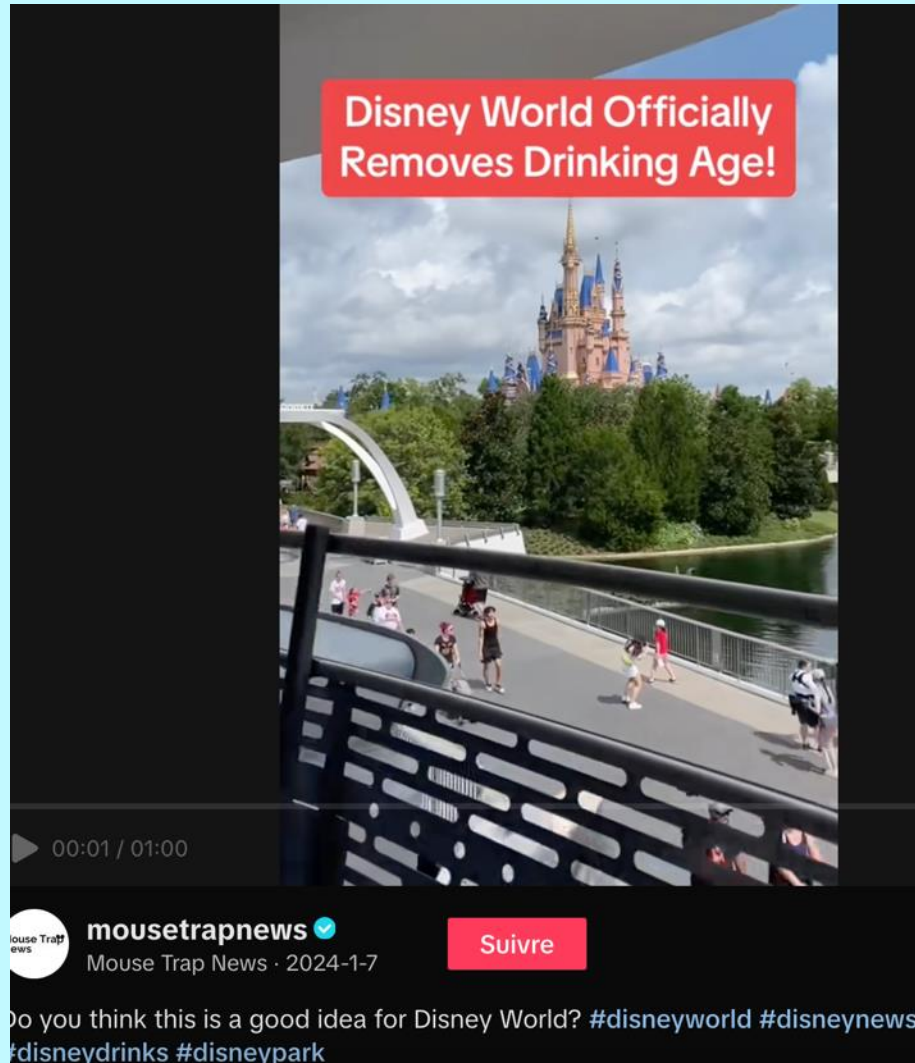
Can you find the source?

**Farmers honour 'Peanuts' creator
Charles M. Schulz with corn mazes
across Canada and U.S.**

Mark Kennedy, The Associated Press

In a search engine, use the keywords:
peanuts mazes associated press

Find the source: Is this story true?



Mouse Trap News

Drinking age

The legal drinking age is the minimum age at which a person can legally consume alcoholic beverages in a certain province, state or country.

In Canada, the drinking age is 19 in most provinces and is 18 in Alberta, Manitoba, and Quebec.

In the United States, the drinking age is 21.

2. Find the source: Images

Do a reverse image search:

1. Right-click to “Copy image location”
2. Go to [Tineye.com](https://tineye.com) and paste the link
3. Sort the result to see the Oldest at the top

If you can't copy the image link, take a screenshot and then upload it

Find the source: Where did this image come from?



Find the source: Where did this image come from?



Image link: <https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/images/ic/1376xn/p0ft8pgr.jpg.webp>

Watch this video: Verify the source



[Verify the Source Video](#)

Videos on this page: [Break the Fake: How to tell what's true online](#)

3. Verify the source


To find out if a source is reliable, ask:

- Do they really exist?
- Are they who they say they are?
- Are they trustworthy?


3. Verify the source: Do they really exist?

It's easy to fake a webpage or a whole website.


Do a search on Google or Wikipedia to find out if they really exist.

 **The Toronto Star**
<https://www.thestar.com> › site › about


About the Star - The Toronto Star
The **Star** Mission and Atkinson Principles. The **Toronto Star** is a multi-platform news organization that makes things happen. We inform, connect, investigate, report and effect change.
Canada's Largest Daily
thestar.com is one of Canada's largest online news sites and 100%...

 **Wikipedia**
<https://en.wikipedia.org> › wiki › Toronto_Star

Toronto Star - Wikipedia
The **Toronto Star** is a Canadian English-language broadsheet daily newspaper. It is owned by **Toronto Star Newspapers Limited**, a subsidiary of **Torstar Corporation** and part of **Torstar's Daily News Brands** division. [5]The newspaper was established in 1892 as the **Evening Star** and was later renamed the...

 **Media Bias/Fact Check**
<https://mediabiasfactcheck.com> › toronto-star

Toronto Star - Bias and Credibility - Media Bias/Fact Check
5 days ago · **The Star** has consistently been considered left-center and is more socially liberal than The **Globe and Mail**. Read our profile on Canadian media and government. Funded by / Ownership. The **Toronto Star** is owned by **Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.** (a subsidiary of **Nordstar Capital LP**), which...

 **History of Toronto**
<https://historyoftoronto.ca> › blog › discovering-the-toronto-star-canadas-largest-daily-newspaper...

What is Toronto Star - The Leading Canadian Newspaper
Apr 16, 2024 - **Toronto Star** is a daily newspaper based in **Toronto, Canada**. It is one of the most

3. Verify the source: Are they who they say they are?

Search for their official web address on Wikipedia or in a search engine.



<https://freshnewtips.com/>

3. Verify the source: Are they trustworthy?

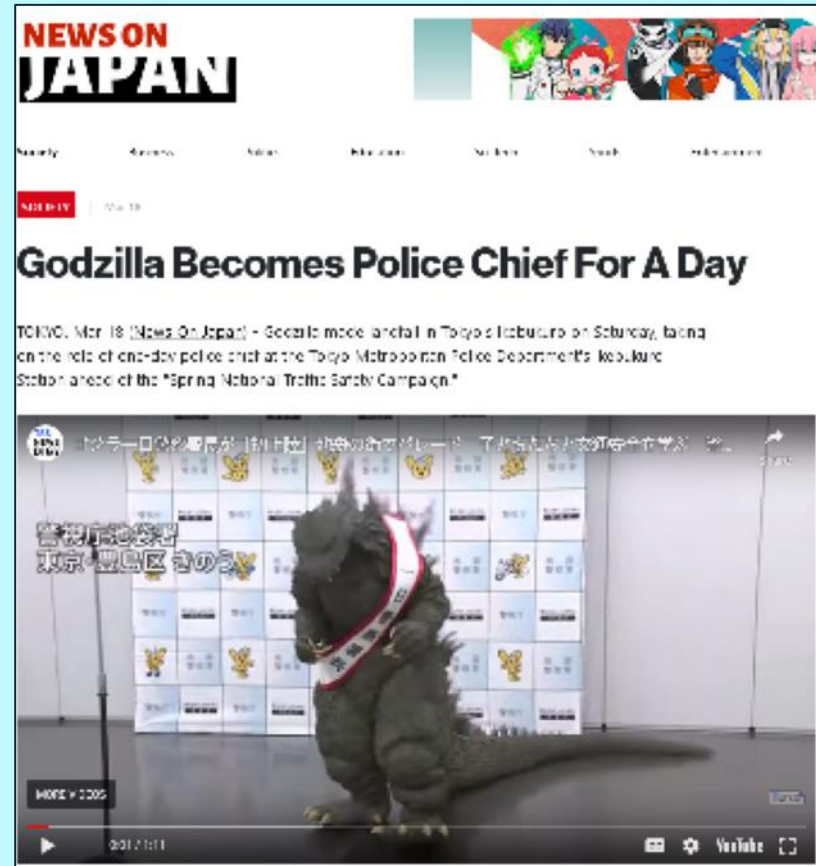
Ask questions like:

- Do they make mistakes? Do they admit them and publish corrections?
- Are they willing to publish things their owners disagree with?

Look at their Wikipedia page to answer these questions.

For more specialized sources, do a search on them to see if they are experts on the subject.

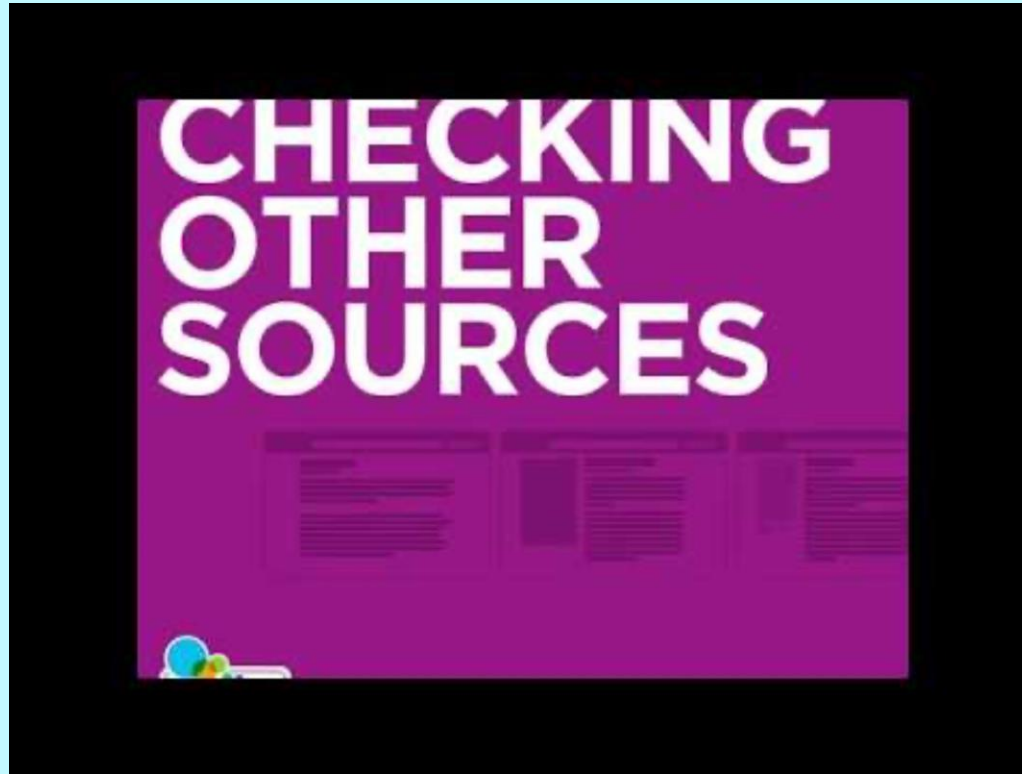
Which source can you say with confidence is reliable?



Godzilla is a fictional monster that was introduced in a 1954 film called Godzilla. The character has since become an international pop culture icon.

Godzilla looks like a dinosaur and lives in the ocean. The monster was awakened and empowered by exposure to nuclear radiation and nuclear testing.

Watch this video: Checking other sources



[Checking Other Sources Video](#)

Videos on this page: [Break the Fake: How to tell what's true online](#)

4. Check other sources

This step may sometimes be the last one you do, but it could also be the first.

Looking at other sources can help you find out if

- the first place you saw something might have been leaving something out
- something agrees with what most experts on that topic think – what's called the consensus view

The Newstab is better than the main 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.

4. Check other sources: Consensus view



What do you think? Are octopus aliens? What do most experts think?

Use the MediaSmarts custom search at tiny.cc/sciencesearch to find the consensus view on specialist topics like science and medicine.

See one, do one, teach one

- You can make fact checking a habit
- It's important that we all stop the spread of misinformation

How do we make change?

It is possible to change a whole society's mind about things.

Can you think of some examples when society changed and adopted a new rule or guideline?

How did it happen?

Making change

- Sometimes changes in social norms happen on their own.
- Sometimes they're caused by media portrayals (including advertising).
- Sometimes they happen in part because of deliberate public service campaigns aimed at changing people's attitudes.

Can you think of some examples?

See one, do one, teach one

- You can make fact checking a habit
- It's important that we all stop the spread of misinformation

Now you are going to build a public service campaign in order to encourage people to adopt a new habit.

Public Service Announcements

A **public service announcement (PSA)** is a message in the public interest distributed by the media for free to raise public awareness and change behavior.

It is like a free advertisement that, rather than trying to sell us something, is trying to

- make us aware of something
- persuade us to do something
- persuade us to do something differently.

Watch this video: House Hippo PSA

What issue is the PSA about?

How does it make the viewer care about the issue?

What does it ask the viewer to do?



[House Hippo PSA Video](#)

Let's try it

Create 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.

1. Decide on an audience for your PSA – who needs persuading?
2. Write a message to that audience.
3. Choose one of the 4 steps.
4. Show your audience how to do that one step in your PSA.

PSA Guidelines

- 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 in a way that your audience will understand.

Test your PSA

When you are done, share your PSA and get some feedback.

- How well did explain the issue?
- Did you convince your audience to do something new or do something differently?

Put your teacher hat on!

Reflection questions

As a learner:

- What did you learn?
- What worked well for you?

As a teacher:

- What do you think learners in the program would think of the activities from MediaSmarts?

See what some teachers thought here:

[Fact-checking Padlet](#)



Instructional Supports

[Brake the fake : Verifying information online](#)

In this [package](#):

- Lesson plan
- 4 student handouts



Other lesson plans from MediaSmarts on the topic of verifying information

- [Brake the fake : Becoming a fact checker](#)
- [Mixed Signals: Verifying Online Information](#)
- [Reality Check: Authentication 101](#)
- [Reality Check: Authentication and Citizenship](#)
- [Reality Check: Getting the Goods on Science and Health](#)
- [Reality Check: News You Can Use](#)

MediaSmarts Framework

Use, Understand & Engage: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools

4 principles: Access, Use, Understand and Engage

9 key aspects of digital media literacy:

Reading Media, Media Representation, Ethics and Empathy, Privacy and Security, Community Engagement, Media Health, Consumer Awareness, Finding and Verifying, Making and Remixing.

Teacher questions

What do you think of these resources?

Could you use them in the program where you work?

Who would they work for?

What adaptations would be necessary?



Contact us for more information and support

Guylaine Vinet

gvinet@alphaplus.ca

alphaplus.ca

416-322-1012 x 121

1-800-788-1120 x 121

Tracey Mollins

tmollins@alphaplus.ca

alphaplus.ca

416-322-1012 x 108

1-800-788-1120 x 108

