Check Before You Share

How can you tell if something is true? If a source can be trusted? If you should share something or take a different action?

Follow the following six steps to fact-check information.

1. Check your emotions.

   Information that causes you to feel a strong emotion—positively or negatively—is important to fact-check.

   What do you know for certain?

   What doubts should you address?

2. Check for previous work.

   See if someone has already done the fact-checking work for you. Even if you do not agree with the conclusion of the fact-checking site, they may have included links back to the original source, identified owners of websites, or provided links to reputable sources for counter-claims or more information.

3. Go upstream to the source.

   Go “upstream” to the source of the claim. Most web content is not original. Get to the original source to understand the trustworthiness of the information.

   If the claim is about research, can you find the academic journal where it was first published?

   If the claim is about an event, can you find the original publication?
4. Read laterally.

Maybe you get lucky and the source is something known to be reputable, such as the journal *Science* or the newspaper the *New York Times*. Again, if so, you can stop there. If not, you're going to need to read laterally, finding out more about this source you've ended up at and asking whether it is trustworthy.

Think about your topic? Who would be considered an expert on the subject?

Publication  Expertise  Accountability

5. Circle back.

If you get lost, or hit dead ends, start over with the knowledge you've already gained through your search. You'll likely take a more informed path with different search terms and better decisions.

If the source you find is not trustworthy, complex questions emerge, or the claim turns out to have multiple sub-claims, then you have to circle back and start a new process.

--Rewrite the claim.
--Find an alternative source.
--Try a new search of fact-checking sites.

6. Take action!

Once you have a better handle on the information you found, you can share it, report it, or comment on it. You can even take no action at all in order to prevent the story from getting further traction online.

REFERENCES

Content was adapted from *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers* by Mike Caulfield of Washington State University Vancouver. (http://webliteracy.pressbooks.com; CC-BY-4)