



# Truth Seeker

**W**e're often told that we live in the age of information. It's true we're surrounded by data—from TV, the Internet, and from our friends. But not all information is created equal. Some is misleading, and some is downright wrong. It's important to know how to uncover the truth in what we see and hear, to judge sources on credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support for their claims. In this badge, you'll find out how to separate fact from fiction.

## Steps

1. Evaluate your sources
2. Investigate what the experts say
3. Be a wise consumer
4. Find truth in your everyday life
5. Become a citizen journalist

## Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll be able to figure out what is true in the media, online, and what I hear in my daily life.

*"Truth is the only safe ground to stand on."*

—Elizabeth Cady Stanton,  
American social activist

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

## TIPS BEFORE TAKEOFF

- ▶ **Caution!** Some websites require registration information. Even if you can register for free and use the site, make sure to check with an adult first. And never give out personal information.
- ▶ Be sure to sign the Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge before you begin.

### STEP

## 1 Evaluate your sources

See how different news outlets and different ways of delivering information compare when it comes to accuracy and reliability.

### CHOICES - DO ONE:

- ☐ **Monitor the news.** Choose a news story and follow the same story in two forms of media: newspaper, news magazine, Internet, TV, or news radio. Do different outlets report the story differently? Which one provided the most in-depth coverage? Which one seemed most reliable?

OR

- ☐ **Evaluate the same story on three websites.** Pick a news story, a health issue, an entertainment article, or story on the topic of your choice. Use the CARS Checklist (Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness, Support) to evaluate each. Once you've evaluated each site, rank them in order of how much you trust them, from most to least.

OR

- ☐ **Categorize sources of information.** Find a magazine, newspaper, or online source that fits each of the following categories:

- **Substantive:** verified information, often published in newspapers or news magazines
- **Scholarly:** information from academic sources such as a medical journal or a college literature website
- **Popular:** reflecting a consumer-based audience, such as a fashion magazine
- **Sensational:** arousing strong curiosity, most likely gossip-based, such as a celebrity-focused magazine

The categories may not be clear-cut, so go with what makes the most sense if you were to describe the media outlet to a friend. Now figure out what is different about each of the categories. Is academic content displayed in a serious way with fewer graphics? What are visuals like for a sensational publication? Why do different sources use different visuals and language?

*The global landscape is one in which only one in six people live in a country with a free press.*

*The Freedom of the Press annual survey reported declines in press freedom in Mexico, the Philippines, and Senegal. China, Russia, and Venezuela continue to censor and block access to certain media information, especially on the Internet.*

—from *Freedom of the Press 2010: A Global Survey of Media Independence*

### More to Explore

#### Examine press freedom.

Our First Amendment grants Americans freedom of the press. But what happens when a media outlet leaks information that our government did not intend for public consumption? Does this media breach threaten our national security, or are media outlets simply exercising our right to a free press? Find one recent example and examine the pros and cons.



# CARS CHECKLIST

Every day, sometimes without realizing it, you evaluate information to decide whether or not to take it seriously. Let's say you see a posting online that says your school is closed Friday, but you haven't heard that. How do you know that

the posting is true? You can get a better idea about the reliability of any story using these guidelines to evaluate the source. Not every source will meet all these criteria, but the more you can check off, the more reliable the source.



SCHOOL CLOSING  
From: aforecast@centralhigh.edu  
To: student@centralhigh.org  
NOTIFICATION OF SCHOOL CLOSING  
January 27, 2011  
5:30 AM

Due to inclement weather, Central  
Thank you and have a safe winter  
Antonia Forecaster, Principal  
Central High School

facebook

Snow Forecaster  
CLOSING ALERT

School Closings

Personal Blog

Wall

Sno  
CLOS

School Closings

There are no Closings or Delays

--LD

22 hours ago

Community

Discussions Categories

Our Town: SCHOOL CLOSINGS

1 of 1

bodybak

January 27th 2011 6:11:37 AM

SCHOOLS CLOSING

Messages Sherry...

Call

Contact Info

Jan 26, 2011 8:19 PM

Big snowstorm coming  
tomorrow! SNOW!!! NO  
SCHOOL!!! :-)

## Credibility

Look for such things as trustworthy sources, authors' credentials, evidence of quality control, known or respected authorities on a topic, and organizational support.

**Goal:** Use an authoritative source, one that supplies some good evidence that allows you to trust it.

**Example:** Does the posting cite who wrote it, what their job is, how they know about your school?

## Accuracy

It should be up-to-date, factual, detailed, exact, comprehensive, and reflect intentions of completeness and accuracy.

**Goal:** Find a source that is correct today (not yesterday), a source that gives the whole truth.

**Example:** Does the posting list a date, plenty of details, and a reference to the authority who made the decision to close school?

## Reasonableness

Is it fair, balanced, objective, reasoned, with no conflict of interest, absence of fallacies, or slanted tone?

**Goal:** Find a source that engages the subject thoughtfully and reasonably, one that is concerned with the truth.

**Example:** Is the posting on a site that often contains pranks? Or is it a site frequented by students from other schools—maybe sports rivals who would think it funny to keep you out of school?

## Support

Are there listed sources, contact information, available corroboration, claims supported, documentation supplied?

**Goal:** Use a source that provides convincing evidence for the claims made, a source you can triangulate (find at least two other sources that support it).

**Example:** Does the posting list a contact to call for more information, or sources where they got the information?



## STEP 2 Investigate what the experts say

Find out if people who make headlines have their facts straight. Check numbers, figures, and statistical assertions using websites like [factcheck.org](http://factcheck.org) or [politifact.com](http://politifact.com) or another qualified source.

### CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ Choose an article from a political blog or a newspaper's opinion page. Highlight passages with figures or statistics, or statements that are delivered as fact but might be opinion. Then check them out!  
OR .....
- ☐ Monitor a news-based or political talk show. Test the statements of the guests for accuracy.  
OR .....
- ☐ Analyze a speech given by a public figure. Check facts and figures and note how they're used to support the speaker's views.

### Urban Myths

Twenty years ago, a rumor would take days, even weeks, to reach a tipping point. Now, with the Internet, it can take seconds. Before you know it, a friend is forwarding a chain e-mail warning about a massive computer virus or a store product reportedly laced with anthrax.

These e-mails sound credible and are often tagged with a subject line such as: "Forward this to everyone you know!" Fortunately, there are websites—such as [snopes.com](http://snopes.com), [truthorfiction.com](http://truthorfiction.com), and [urbanlegends.about.com](http://urbanlegends.about.com)—devoted to debunking and explaining these e-mail hoaxes.

### More to Explore

**Examine a school myth.** School campuses are breeding grounds for rumors. Perhaps you've heard that a certain teacher is a former rock star or that there is a school-wide outbreak of lice or pinkeye. Research the origins and truths about these school myths. For instance, in the two examples provided, you might interview the teacher and the school nurse. If possible, get permission from your school administrator to post your findings on a school website or on a campus bulletin board.





## STEP 3 Be a wise consumer

Search for truth in advertising.

### CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Know before you buy.** Go to an online shopping site that sells something: shoes, clothes, a car, or even auto insurance. Read the fine print and claims the company makes about its product. Then check the library for issues of *Consumer Reports* to see whether the claims stand up.

OR

- ☐ **Find a vintage ad in a magazine or newspaper.** Look for an ad from the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s. Check out the Federal Trade Commission's policies in that ad's category and rewrite it in a way that the ad might run today.

OR

- ☐ **Evaluate a disclaimer from an ad.** A disclaimer is the "fine print" listing special qualifications—like a "not including taxes or fees" disclaimer next to a price. Find out how Federal Trade Commission policies govern the category of ad you choose. Does the ad satisfy the regulations? For a medical ad, check out the government policies about full disclosure. Did the company follow the rules? (What are the rules if the ad is televised?)



## Where Do You Seek the Truth?

Sixty-six percent of high-school students get their news and information from the news pages of Internet portals such as Google and Yahoo!

(Source: [www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm](http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm))

Forty-five percent of high-school students say TV provides the most accurate news; 23 percent say newspapers.

(Source: [www.firstamendmentfuture.org](http://www.firstamendmentfuture.org))



## Media Literacy

We are heavily influenced by what we read, see, and hear. The Center for Media Literacy suggests you ask these five key questions when analyzing information:



Who created this message?



What techniques are used to attract my attention?



How might different people understand this message differently from me?



Why was this message sent?



What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

## STEP 4 Find truth in your everyday life

Evaluate the information you pick up every day, from all kinds of sources.

### CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Become an investigative reporter for a week.** Write down interesting “facts” you hear from your circle of friends. It could be “Drinking diet sodas makes you gain weight” or “Music sounds better on vinyl than on CDs.” Then investigate the facts using the research tools and critical thinking you developed in the first three steps. Discuss your findings with your friends and family.

OR

- ☐ **Be a Super Searcher.** Search five websites for information about something that interests you—where to travel in China, a camping question, the best colleges in the country, etc. Separate reliable from questionable data. Did any sites seem more believable than others? Where does the information come from? Do ads support the site? If not, who pays for it? Discuss your recommendations with your friends and family.

OR

- ☐ **Review the review.** Look at promotional materials for a movie you want to see or a book you want to read. Compare those with reviews that have been posted on websites by people who have seen the movie or read the book, and reviews by experts who write about the subject. Then see the movie or read the book, and write your own review. Share it with your friends and family.



## STEP 5 Become a citizen journalist

Try your hand at communicating truthful information to others through an article, letter, blog post, or video. Be sure to cite several credible sources to bolster your points.

### CHOICES – DO ONE:

- ☐ **Send a letter to the editor.** Choose an issue you care about, and write a letter to your favorite magazine, newspaper, or blog. Include your sources!

OR

- ☐ **Research and write an article.** Choose an issue you care about or a topic that interests you.

**FOR MORE FUN:** Pitch it to a local newspaper, magazine, or other media outlet for possible publication.

OR

- ☐ **Make a video or a photo slide show with captions.** Cover an event in your neighborhood or school that you think your friends or community should know about. Promote it through social media.

### Careers to Explore



Private or police detective	Fact checker and researcher
Polygraph test operator	Investigative journalist
Forensic scientist	Documentary filmmaker
Anthropologist	Pathologist
Computer forensic investigator	Coroner
Crime lab analyst	Medical examiner
Criminologist	Scientist
Crime scene investigator	Media talk show host
Insurance claims	Special agent (CIA, FBI, Secret Service, Homeland Security)
Operations research analyst	Lawyer or judge





### ***Add the Badge to Your Journey***

For step 5, try creating an article or video to educate and inspire others about what you've learned about a food or land issue. Maybe you can even get others interested in your Harvest project!

### **Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:**

- Helping others determine the accuracy of advertisements
- Sharing informed and fact-based opinions about causes I care about
- Evaluating and using the best information to develop my Take Action project



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### ***I'm inspired to:***