



Senior Truth Seeker

We'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.

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



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- **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?

Step 2: Investigate what the experts say.

Find out if people who make headlines have their facts straight. Check numbers, figures, and statistical assertions by researching qualified sources from a library or online.

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.

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



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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?)

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.



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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.

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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