

# TELUS Wise

Bring digital literacy education into your classroom.



## Lesson plan: Making fact-checking a habit.

Created in partnership with MediaSmarts.



**Grades:** 9 -12

**Duration:** 1 hour

### Overview

In this lesson, students consider the reasons why we do or do not verify online content and then learn simple steps to make fact-checking faster and more habitual.

### Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Reflect on the reasons why we sometimes do not verify online information
- Learn key online verification skills
- Develop a habit of fact-checking online content before sharing it

### Preparation and materials

- Prepare to share the slideshow **Real or Fake?**
- Prepare to show the following videos:
  - **MediaSmarts: Digital Media are Networked**
  - **Motorcyclist plunges into sinkhole in China while fiddling with his phone**
  - **Live Clam Licks Salt on a Table**
  - **Economy Class Flight! Weasel hitching a ride on the back of a Woodpecker in East London**
  - **Eagle Snatches Baby in Viral Video: Caught on Tape - Is it Real or Fake?**
- Ensure students have access to the internet

## Procedure

**Begin by showing the MediaSmarts video Digital Media are Networked.** Pause at 1:10 and ask students the questions onscreen:

- Think of the last time you learned something or saw a news story online.
  - How did you know if it was true?
  - What steps did you take to find out?

**Don't comment on or correct students' responses,** just let them share their experiences for a few minutes.

Now, say you're going to quickly test their ability to tell real images from fake ones online. **Project slides 1-5 of the Real or Fake? slideshow** and ask students which ones they think are real, which ones they think are fake, and how they think they know.

**After a few minutes' discussion, show slides 6-9.** Point out that in each case, the answer could easily have been the opposite; there often isn't any way to tell whether something online is real or fake just by looking at it.

Ask students how many of them do anything to verify what they see online. Tell them that if they don't, they're in good company: while almost 9 in 10 Canadian high school students say they verify information when they need it for school, just over half do anything to make sure what they see on social media is true.

**Now ask students why people don't always fact-check.** Let them discuss it for a few minutes, while ensuring the following two excuses are raised: it doesn't matter because most online content is too trivial to bother with fact-checking; and it takes too long to fact-check. Both of these excuses can contribute to sharing false information online.

**Show slides 10-15.** Point out that digital media being networked means we also have an ethical responsibility not to share false/misleading information online, because we are a link in the chain that either prevents or allows false or misleading information to spread. For that reason, we should make sure to, at the very least, fact-check anything we're going to share with other people.

Now, tell students that while it may seem like it would take forever or feel like a waste of time to fact check before sharing - it's critical, because as they can see through slides 10-15, you can't tell whether something is real or fake just by looking at the image. Instead, they can verify almost anything in five minutes or less with three simple steps.

### **Fact-checking step 1: Finding the original source**

Tell students that the first step is often to find the original source: there's no point in finding out if a source is reliable if you're not sure that's where the information originated.

Show the video **Motorcyclist plunges into sinkhole in China while fiddling with his phone** and give students 5 minutes to verify it using any online tools they like. After five minutes, have students share their findings and how they reached them.

Explain that they might have been right to be skeptical because the source is RT (a “news outlet” that is known to spread misinformation and propaganda) but if they track the video to its original source they will find it first came from Reuters, a news syndication service with a track record going back more than a hundred years.



Point out that this information is helpful only if you know the difference between RT and Reuters. If you don't, you can use the next strategy, reading laterally - using other sources to get essential context.

## Fact-checking step 2: Lateral reading

Show the video **Live Clam Licks Salt on a Table** and give students 4 minutes to verify it. After four minutes, have students share their findings and how they reached them.

Point out that this is a good example of how online information is often not exactly true or false – while the video is real, the clam is extending its “foot” not because it wants salt (as the video claims) but because it wants to get back in the water. Lateral reading strategies might have included doing research about clams, doing a web search on this video, or looking for similar videos to see if they presented the same information.

## Fact-checking step 3: Fact-checking websites

Now, tell students that they can often fact-check even more quickly by using online tools such as fact-checking sites. Show the video **Economy Class Flight! Weasel hitching a ride on the back of a Woodpecker in East London** and give students 3 minutes to verify it. After three minutes, have students share their findings and how they reached them.

Tell students that while there were things about the video that might have made them skeptical, such as the robotic narration and amateur-looking onscreen text, if they checked **Snopes.com** or did an online search for “weasel hummingbird hoax” they would see that the original video is in fact real.

Show students the video **Eagle Snatches Baby in Viral Video: Caught on Tape - Is it Real or Fake?** and give students 2 minutes to verify it. After two minutes, have students share their findings and how they reached them.

Make sure to raise examples of identifying the original source (the video is a hoax, created by students at Montreal's National Animation and Design Center), reading laterally (doing a search for terms such as “eagle grabs baby video”) and using online tools (consulting Snopes or similar sites.)

Tell students this video is also a good example of the importance of fact-checking before you share information found online, because while it's from what ought to be a reliable source (ABC News), the hosts present it without taking a stand on whether it's real or not.

Point out to students that if they can verify a video like this in less than two minutes, they have no excuse not to do that every time they want to share something they see online.