

The realness report: Auditing influencers



Students will analyze how influencers build trust, shape identity and use persuasive tactics to influence their audience. By examining influencer content to uncover emotional appeals, gender messaging, and “false friend” strategies, this exercise will help them become more aware of how curated online personas affect beliefs and digital well-being.

Student objectives:

- Critically analyze the messaging, tactics and impact of real online influencers
- Identify persuasive techniques, including “false friend” tactics
- Reflect on how influencers shape beliefs about identity and self-worth
- Create and present an “audit report” with recommendations for healthy media engagement

Materials:

- Influencer audit sheet handout, one per group
- Devices for quick access to YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok (or printed sample content)
- Projector/board for warm-up examples

Instructions

1. Introduction: “Trust check”

Prompt (on board or verbally): “What makes an influencer feel trustworthy or not?”

Display 1-2 quotes or captions (real or fictional) that reflect false friend tactics, such as:

- “Only weak men show emotion.”
- “I used to be a nobody until I learned the real truth.”
- “They don’t want you to win. But I do.”

Discuss briefly:

- What emotions do these spark?
- What tactics are being used to grab attention?

2. Group audit

In small groups, students choose one influencer (or teacher assigns one) and analyze just 1 – 2 posts using the Influencer audit sheet.

3. Quick shares and discussions

Invite groups to share some examples from their audit.

“One red flag we saw was...”

“One takeaway from our audit was...”

Influencer audit sheet

Influencer name/handle: _____

Platform: _____

Post analyzed (brief description or title): _____

Check all that apply:

- ☐ Shares personal struggles
- ☐ Makes audience feel included
- ☐ Uses emotional language (anger, sadness, hope)
- ☐ Blames another group
- ☐ Sells a product or solution
- ☐ Claims to tell “the real truth”
- ☐ Uses terms like “take control,” “no excuses,” “emotional = weak,” etc.

Questions:

1. What message is this influencer trying to send?

2. What emotions are being targeted?

3. What persuasive or “false friend” tactics do you notice?

4. What messages (explicit or implied) are shared about gender roles?

5. Is it helpful, harmful or mixed? Why?

6. Would you recommend following this person? Why or why not?
