



## 2 FACT SHEET HOW CAN YOU RECOGNIZE A RELIABLE WEBSITE?

### OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

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#### DISCIPLINE AND LEVEL CONCERNED ERC (Cycle 1 - Secondary)

##### Autonomy:

- Name some conditions that favour autonomy (e.g. critical judgment, common sense, moral responsibility, ability to choose, authenticity, resourcefulness);
- Name some references that support and enrich ethical thinking about autonomy (e.g. charters, laws, regulations, persons, media).

#### TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Collaborate with digital technology;
- Create content with digital technology;
- Develop and mobilize your information literacy;
- Communicate with digital technology;
- Develop critical thinking regarding digital technology.

#### SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Mentimeter;
- Canva;
- Padlet or Middlespot.

#### EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, the learners will be able to do their own research and verify information on their own by adopting the necessary tools to identify reliable information sites.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Choose neutral and relevant information sources;
- Identify the factors that characterize reliable and credible websites or media;
- Identify the factors that characterize websites or media that must be treated with suspicion;
- Compare similar publications and be able to distinguish the factors that are meant to be misleading.

## INTRODUCTION

Credible and suspicious sites exist side by side and resemble each other. In addition to newspapers, the information on which Web users rely also comes from social media (Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram), blogs, alternative media, parody websites... even YouTubers and influencers! However, these websites and social media have one problem in common: all the information found there looks similar, whether good, bad, true, false, exaggerated, etc.

To be properly informed on the Web, whether to do research for schoolwork or to keep informed about the latest news, it is essential, first and foremost, to be able to recognize which websites are reliable... and which ones to ignore.

## WHO IS BEHIND THE SITE: THE "ABOUT US" AND "CONTACT US" SECTIONS

A serious website clearly posts its mission, its mandate and its contact information in the "About us" or "Contact us" sections. You will find the necessary information in these sections to know who is hiding behind the site, contact the authors and deepen your research on the members of the team. Usually, these sections are found at the very top or the very bottom of a Web page.

In general, parody websites indicate in these sections that their publications should not be taken seriously. However, this isn't always the case. Some dishonest authors only want to entrap you!

To rely on a website or even on a social media profile, it's important to know who is feeding it. If the articles you consult aren't signed or are written under pseudonyms, this is a bad sign and you must be careful.

If you don't know the author's name, nothing prevents you from running a short search to learn a little more about his or her expertise (the author's education, background, etc.). This search might show you that the person who signed the text is not the expert or the journalist he or she claims to be!

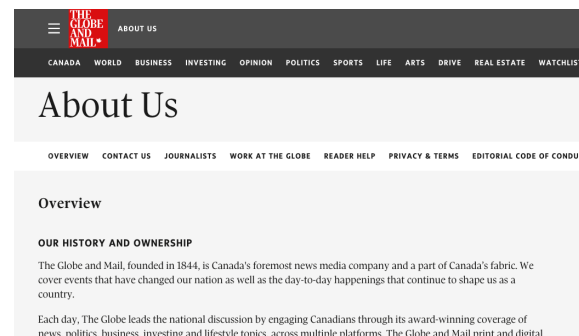
If the website provides no contact information and remains very vague about its mandate, be suspicious.

### Questions to ask yourself:

- Can I easily contact the people responsible for the website?
- Are the articles humorous?
- Are the authors easy to find?
- What is the website's mandate?
- Does the author want to inform you or sell you something?

### Example 1

The *Globe and Mail's* website has a very thorough "About Us" section. You will find a list of the different departments heads, in addition to relevant information on the newspaper.



### Example 2

The "Site Disclaimer" of the website [thebeaverton.com](http://thebeaverton.com) contains a crucial piece of information: "The Beaverton is a news satire and parody publication. All articles are contained within this website and on its social media accounts." However, this is the only place where this "little" detail is specified.

## IS THE INFORMATION NEUTRAL?

The reliable media have the mandate to present neutral and balanced information. To write a balanced article, for example, a journalist must present all the relevant expertise and points of view.

**Attention:** This doesn't mean to say that all points of view have value! For example, a scientist's expertise carries much more weight than the opinion of a Web user who denies climate change.

Of course, there are a multitude of websites that present only their own point of view, and even many that denigrate the opposite opinion. This is often the case for websites of political parties or activists. Everyone has the right to express their opinion. However, every bias must be clearly indicated and not presented as neutral information.

**Attention:** Some activist websites pass for real information sites.

### Questions to consider:

- Are several different opinions presented?
- Are the points of view presented relevant?
- Is the author's tone neutral? Does the author use a lot of exclamation points, capital letters, pejorative terms?
- Is the author of the text a journalist? An expert? An activist?

## DOES THE WEBSITE HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION?

Some journalists and media have the mandate to identify suspicious websites and debunk false information circulating on the Web. There are even directories of shady websites! If a website repeatedly shares fake news, be suspicious.



Enter the address (URL) of a Web page or the name of a website below to find out if the source of information (the person who disseminates it) is reliable or not.

**Tip:** The *Décodex*, created by the French newspaper *Le Monde*, is a search engine that allows you to verify sources quickly.

Here are some English-language fact-checking websites:

- Snopes.com
- Politifact.com
- FactCheck.org
- NPR.org
- Washington Post Fact Checker
- BuzzFeed News

### Question to consider:

- Does this website often share fake news?

## MULTIPLY YOUR SOURCES!

Do you have doubts about a website's content? Look for it elsewhere! Except for exclusive stories, the news is relayed between media. If no traditional media mention a news item that is apparently important, you must question the credibility of the information.

### Questions to consider:

- Does this information come from only one website?
- Have other journalists or experts mentioned the subject?

## TRAPS TO AVOID

### The authors or the media don't take responsibility for their statements

Journalists and experts have the duty to relay factual information. They follow strict and rigorous codes. By reporting false information, they risk losing their job or tarnishing their reputation. You must therefore be suspicious of websites that take their distance from their authors' articles, advice and information.

**Attention:** Quickly identify the "Disclaimers", which are very common on suspicious websites that publish articles on health.

#### Example

The **healthyfoodhouse.com** website, which publishes articles on health, wellness and natural remedies, specifies the following in its *Disclaimer* section:

*"It is important to mention that not all natural remedies we write about are 100% efficient, nor confirmed as such by a conventional doctor. Most of the homemade remedies are supported by studies providing evidence in favor of their efficacy, and opinions by holistic doctors, so we cannot guarantee that a certain recipe will help you in the treatment of any other similar health condition.*

*Also, we disclaim any responsibility for the content of the web sites we have linked."*

### Copiers and names that "sound" credible

Websites that pose as news media use several tactics to mislead the reader. The most popular is to model themselves on serious websites that inspire trust. Most copy the appearance of serious social media almost exactly and create almost identical Web addresses (URL).

Other suspicious websites prefer to adopt an air of respectability by choosing a name that "sounds" serious. For example, the *World News Daily Report* is a spoof website. The *Sherbrooke Times*, which pretends to be a local English-language medium, steals articles from serious newspapers and is not a Québec website. Radio-Canada discovered that it was registered in Ukraine.

## WIKIPEDIA: TRUST IT OR NOT?

Wikipedia is a very good means for starting research. The articles have a very thorough "References" section that can lead you to many interesting websites.

Before relying on information found on Wikipedia, it is best to check these references. To do this, click on the hyperlinks and the reference number (indicated in very small type above a term to the right). Does the information come from a serious website?

### History [\[ edit \]](#)

The core technology behind Google Earth was originally developed at Intrinsic Graphics in the late 1990s. At the time the company was developing 3D gaming software libraries.<sup>[6]</sup> As a demo of their 3D software, they created a spinning globe that could be zoomed into, similar to the *Powers of Ten* film.<sup>[6]</sup> The demo was popular, but the board of Intrinsic wanted to remain focused on gaming, so in 1999, they created Keyhole, Inc., headed by **John Hanke**.<sup>[6]</sup> Keyhole then developed a way to stream large databases of mapping data over the internet to client software, a key part of the technology,<sup>[7]</sup> and acquired patchworks of mapping data from governments and other sources.<sup>[6]</sup> The product, called "Keyhole EarthViewer", was sold on CDs for use in fields such as **real estate**, **urban planning**, **defense**, and **intelligence**; users paid a yearly fee for the service.<sup>[7]</sup> Despite making a number of capital deals with **Nvidia** and **Sony**,<sup>[7]</sup> the small company was struggling to make payroll, and employees were leaving.<sup>[6]</sup>

# EXERCISES

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## EXERCISE 1

**Read the following fictitious scenario:**

About 5,000 demonstrators are blocking Autoroute 117 at several locations in Québec. They are denouncing a new provincial law that would require adolescents under age 17 to have systematic monitoring of their phone, their computer and any other electronic device connected to the Internet. Traffic has been blocked for the past two days and several communities are cut off from the rest of the province.

**Which of the websites/media listed will tend to present neutral and relevant information? Explain your choices.**

1. The official website of the organizers of the demonstrations;
2. A demonstrator's Twitter account;
3. The local newspaper;
4. The official website of the security firm mandated to monitor the devices;
5. The National on CBC
6. The blog of an expert on security and privacy issues;
7. The YouTube channel of a bus driver stuck on the highway;
8. The Twitter account of a surgeon analyzing the situation.

**Suggested activity:** Use of the Mentimeter platform to create two word clouds. The teacher proposes that the students first write three information sources they know and consider reliable and credible on Menti (the learner platform). Then repeat the same exercise, this time, naming three websites or media that they consider do not represent neutral and relevant sources. Compare the two word clouds created in this way and have the students discuss their choices. For example, if Wikipedia is found in both word clouds, explore the reasoning behind these choices with the students.

## EXERCISE 2 \*Internet access required\*

**For each of these media, identify the following criteria:**

Postal code, owner (if there is one), editor in chief

The Toronto Star

The Hamilton Spectator

Winnipeg Free Press

**Suggested activity:** On a collaborative virtual wall such as Padlet or Middlespot, invite the students to identify reliable websites or media and add the mission, the mandate and the contact information of each.

# EXERCISES

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## EXERCISE 3 \*Internet access required\*

**These websites publish articles on health and science. Which ones must be treated with suspicion? Explain your choices.**

1. nature.com
2. healthyfoodhouse.com
3. naturalnews.com
4. newscientist.com

**Suggested activity:** Invite the students to produce an infographic with a digital creation tool, such as Canva. The objective is to shed light on the characteristic of a website or a media outlet that must be treated with suspicion. Here are some examples of criteria that may cause you to doubt a source's credibility:

- Does not distinguish opinion from facts;
- Encourages suspicion of credible media;
- Encourages suspicion of science;
- Disclaimer;
- Publishes conspiracy theories;
- Etc.

## EXERCISE 4

**Here are two very similar Facebook publications. What is the difference?**



ICI.RADIO-CANADA.CA

**American customs officials intercept a package containing a human brain.**



ICI.RADO-CANADA.CA

**American customs officials intercept a package containing a human brain.**

# ANSWER KEY

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1.

3, 5, 6

## Possible answers:

- The demonstrators, the security company and the bus driver have a bias. Their opinion on the subject may be relevant, but it isn't neutral.
  - The surgeon is an expert... in surgery. The situation does not concern his field of expertise.
  - The local newspaper and Le Téléjournal on Radio-Canada have the study to paint a neutral picture of the demonstrations while obtaining statements from the authorities relevant to a good understanding of the situation.
  - The security and privacy expert provides a competent and educated analysis of the impacts of the new legislation.
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2.

The Toronto Star: M5E 1E6, Torstar Corporation, Irene Gentle

The Hamilton Spectator: L8N 3G3, Torstar Corporation, Paul Berton

Winnipeg Free Press: V5M 4X7, Postmedia Network, Harold Munro

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3.

2, 3

## Possible answers:

- Nature and NewScientist clearly post their mandate, their methodology and the members of their team.
  - NaturalNews and HealthyFoodHouse both post disclaimers regarding their content. They also contain many conspiracy theories and alarmist news. The comments are not based on serious scientific data/studies.
  - The healthyfoodhouse.com articles are not signed.
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4.

The URL address has been modified in the first screenshot (RADO and not RADIO). Of course, when they are compared side by side, the difference is easy to identify, However, when we quickly scroll down our news wire on Facebook, it's difficult to note these small differences. A URL address that copies another one to give itself credibility can turn out to be dangerous.