

What is verification?



LESSON OBJECTIVE

Students will learn what information verification is and why it is important for news consumers to verify the stories they read or view. They will consider the responsibilities news organizations, audience members and social media companies have in promoting a media landscape of truthful news information.



- ▶ **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**
 - ▶ Do you feel that, overall, your news ecosystem online is factual?
 - ▶ Why or why not?



- ▶ **AGE**
 - ▶ 14-18



- ▶ **MATERIALS**
 - ▶ Pigfish image (projected or printout)
 - ▶ Laptops
 - ▶ Additional teacher resources listed



- ▶ **PREPARATION**
 - ▶ Students will need internet access for this lesson



- ▶ **ISTE DIGCITCOMMIT COMPETENCY**
 - ▶ INFORMED: I evaluate the accuracy, perspective, and validity of digital media and social posts



SUPPORT MATERIALS

Visit facebook.com/fbgetdigital to access resources for parents and young people that can complement the lesson students took on Engagement today.

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What is verification?

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

In 2016, the World News Daily Report website published an article about a National Geographic photographer who was eaten alive by a giant ocean sunfish in Peru.

According to the article, 29-year-old Joaquín Álvarez Santos was on an underwater shoot with four other divers when he was swallowed whole by the fish, which weighed more than 2000 kg (4400 lbs). One of the divers on the shoot, James C. Wyatt, was said to have taken this photograph before the incident took place.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS

- ▶ Spend 2 minutes doing a Google search of this news event. What do you find?

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

You may have discovered in your search that this article is fictional. Every piece of news content has a source, which can be defined as the person, publication or agency that captured an image or has information about the original news event.

The source of this story is the World News Daily Report website, which has a disclaimer stating that it “assumes all responsibility for the satirical nature of its articles” and that “all characters appearing in the articles in this website—even those based on real people—are entirely fictional.” However, you may have also discovered that the photograph is real. It was captured by photographer Miguel Pereira, who encountered a massive sunfish off the coast of Portugal (and lived to tell the tale) in 2013.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS

- ▶ Why do you think the website published this article?
- ▶ Do you think there should be a website that only publishes fictional content?
- ▶ Do you think all readers will realize that World News Daily Report stories are fictional? Why/why not?

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

How many of you have shared news on social media before? People around the world today are reporting events on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and messaging apps like Snapchat and WhatsApp. Millions of people have used social media as an important tool to organize protests and engage with the news (by posting photos/videos/status updates, sharing and commenting). Knowing how to filter and make sense of all this information is an important skill for anyone who wants to consume the news today. This skill becomes especially important because people can create, read or even unwittingly share misinformation and fake news.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS

- ▶ “Can you think of (any) news events where you were fooled by a rumor or a false image or video?” (First Draft)
- ▶ What was the event?
- ▶ How did you figure out that the news was fake?

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

While some people intentionally try to fool news media by, for example, tweeting that the New York Stock Exchange flooded during Hurricane Sandy, other people may share the same information on social media out of a genuine interest to help or update others. “There are often so many false rumors during breaking news events that newsrooms have actually started collecting lists of them” (First Draft). Journalists are trained to remain skeptical of everything they hear and see—whether it is breaking news or viral content—until they can verify or debunk the source.

In this collection of learning experiences, you will learn how to verify information such as videos, images and other news stories so that you can distinguish fact from fiction in the current media landscape. Verification is a process by which a news organization or a person gathers and assesses evidence to investigate if information is accurate or not. Although the process of verification used to be performed mainly by journalists and news organizations, it has become essential for anyone who wants to stay well-informed about current events. In an environment where anybody can create and share information online, especially on social media, being able to verify the content we consume and share is important for building healthy online communities and building a reputation of trust on social media.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS

- ▶ Has anyone heard of fact-checking or fact-checkers before?
- ▶ What do you think fact-checkers do?

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

Fact-checkers are people who identify, then verify or refute every single fact in a piece of writing. Fact-checkers have traditionally worked for newspapers, magazines, authors or book publishers, but in recent decades, they are increasingly verifying political content. As you can see in this article, professionals believe that the number of fact-checkers worldwide will increase in the future due to the rise of social media and user-generated news content.

Verification is examining unofficial sources on the web, sometimes known as “user-generated content,” such as when someone is at an event and then uploads video footage. Fact-checkers look at official sources -- policies, government documents, speeches made by politicians, etc. All fact-checkers use some variant of the verification process. However, as previously mentioned, anyone can use the verification process when consuming

the news. You can use popular websites such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org and NPR's Politics Fact Check to help you verify the accuracy of news content you come across online.

Assignment

IMAGE CLASS INTERACTION

Project the image below on a projection screen at the front of the room. While asking questions, ask students how identifying this image as a hoax is beneficial for publications and news consumers.

ASSIGNMENT

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

This image has been shared on social media sites like Facebook and YouTube with text identifying the creature as a “pigfish” or a “wild hogfish”. Visit the Snopes fact-checking website and review how fact-checkers have refuted this image as a hoax.

Write a short paragraph explaining how identifying this image as a hoax is beneficial for publications and news consumers.

Discussion

TELL YOUR STUDENTS

Traditionally, journalists fact-check information before publishing their work. If they realize the information is false, they drop the image or footage on the cutting room floor. Some people argue that in the age of social media, it is more difficult to differentiate fact from fiction and that audiences now need more help navigating online news.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS

- ▶ Do you think journalists have a responsibility to offer this service to their readers and viewers?
- ▶ Do you think audiences should develop the skills to verify news themselves? If yes: What do you think some of those skills might be?
- ▶ What is the responsibility of social media companies where people post news content?
- ▶ In the past, news organizations have used footage that cannot be 100% verified. Why do you think an organization might make the decision to publish this footage?
- ▶ What might some of the consequences be for publishing unverified information?
- ▶ Do you think there are situations where it is appropriate for people to publish unverified information?

Resources

- ▶ Video by PBS News Hour: Did fake news influence the outcome of Election 2016?
[pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily-videos/why-is-it-important-for-news-sources-to-be-trustworthy](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily-videos/why-is-it-important-for-news-sources-to-be-trustworthy)
- ▶ Video by First Draft: Fake news. It's complicated
[firstdraftnews.org/fake-news-complicated](https://www.firstdraftnews.org/fake-news-complicated)
- ▶ Video by BBC Newsnight: The rise of ‘fake news’, manipulation and ‘alternative facts’
[youtube.com/watch?v=1aTApGWVGol](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aTApGWVGol)
- ▶ Article by The Reporters’ Lab: The number of fact-checkers around the world: 156... and growing
reporterslab.org/the-number-of-fact-checkers-around-the-world-156-and-growing

FACT-CHECKING WEBSITES

- ▶ [snopes.com](https://www.snopes.com)
- ▶ [factcheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org)
- ▶ [npr.org/sections/politics-fact-check](https://www.npr.org/sections/politics-fact-check)
- ▶ Glossary by Youth and Media/First Draft: Information Verification Playlist Glossary
docs.google.com/document/d/1VPGLRf2a7YMAGr-OwF0DQnA9XxAXvKB4IranXCSNHc/edit?usp=sharing

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HANDOUT

Pigfish image



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