

When researching a topic, it is important that we **check the facts** and make sure the sources have been fact checked or written by experts on the subject and accurate! This checklist will provide you with all the necessary information to assure you are using and sharing content that does not spread misinformation or disinformation!

Key Terms

Misinformation: Inaccurate, false, or misleading information. Misinformation may not always be intentional; it can be as easy as sharing a post that was not fact checked!

Disinformation: False or inaccurate information that is used to intentionally mislead audiences. Propaganda is a form of disinformation.

Bias: Showing favor for one side of an issue based on your personal, political beliefs or lived experiences. This can show up in the media if a journalist or author puts their personal beliefs and feelings into their work or aim to sway you on an issue.

Peer Review: When research is fact checked by one or more experts in the subject. Peer reviewers check for bias and accuracy when looking at a body of work.

Expert Credentials: The factors that make an author qualified to write on a subject. This can be professional or academic backgrounds.

Scholarly Source: A piece of writing such as an article, book, or journal that has been produced by an expert or authority in the field. For example, we wouldn't go to a zoology journal for articles about human rights and history.

Popular Source: Platforms for information that include newspapers, magazine articles, websites, and interviews. You have to be extra careful when using these sources, as not all of them are fact checked.

Confirmation Bias: Looking for sources and information that support pre-existing beliefs and ideas, regardless of whether or not they are factual.

Emotionally Neutral Language: Language that does not contain emotion and specifically aims to present information in an unbiased manner.

Sensational Language: A media tactic that aims to incite specific emotions such as sadness, anger, or fear. This often increases return viewership.

What Makes a Scholarly & Popular Source? Why Does It Matter?

- A scholarly source is a piece of writing such as an article, book, or journal that has been produced by an expert or authority in the field. For example, we wouldn't go to a zoology journal for articles about human rights and history.
- You can find an expert's credentials by doing a search and seeing if they went to school for the subject they write about, if they work for an organization that aligns with the subject or hold advanced degrees about the subject.
- Scholarly work should be pulled from current research. Usually, 5 years is a good timeframe for research. In some cases, older sources are acceptable if it aligns with your research- ask a teacher or librarian!
- Scholarly sources often cite their sources so you can see exactly where they got their information from.
- Scholarly work often relies on facts and data, rather than emotional responses and reactions. Keep in mind that data can sometimes be manipulated or overinflated, so it is important to assure the data is coming from an unbiased authority.
- Some sources that have been fact checked may not constitute a scholarly source- these are called popular sources.
- Cross check your sources- are you finding that multiple sources are producing similar data, facts and conclusions?
- Popular sources can include newspapers, magazine articles, websites, and interviews. You have to be extra careful when using these sources, as not all of them are fact checked.
- Ways of checking popular sources include researching who wrote the popular source, using an online fact checker, looking for bias, looking at the language and the way a piece is written-is it trying to make you feel or react a certain way?

What Makes a Scholarly & Popular Source? Why Does It Matter? Cont.

- The audience is often geared towards other experts rather than the public.
- Checking ourselves- we all enter everything we do with our own biases. When researching, we have to make sure we are not favoring sources that only confirm what we already think we know.
- Double check the URL and institution that you are researching. Websites that have .gov and .edu, which often are seen as more scholarly, can be purchased to seem more credible. You should also double check the spelling in the URL, as scammers and inaccurate sources will often add extra letters or misspell popular sites, for example, you may not notice the difference between amazzon.com and amazon.com.
- Although Chat GPT and Wikipedia are easy places to find information, they pull from a multitude of online sources and cannot always be fact checked. You can use these as a launching point, but they should never be your only source of information.
- Just because a webpage looks professional, high tech, and reputable, does not mean it always is.
- It is important to make sure our sources are fact checked to avoid spreading any misinformation- anyone can create a piece of media and claim it as fact, it is up to us to make sure we do the work to stop the spread of misinformation as it can lead to misunderstandings, harm, and conflict.

Test Your Knowledge

1. Which headline comes from a scholarly source? List 3 Reasons Why.

- ☐ Student access to technology at home and learning hours during COVID-19 in the U.S- By Dr. Kolawole Ogundari, PHD, May 2023
- ☐ Technology is Ruining Our Kids—5 Negative Impacts of Technology- By Shawni, October 5, 2017
- ☐ Increase in climate-driven wildfires calls for more investment in prevention, United Nations, 2025
- ☐ Taylor Swift Issues Plea for Donations After ‘Heartbreaking’ Wildfires- Sky News, 2025

Reasoning:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

2. Label which sources you think are a scholarly source and which you think is a popular source and why?

Oxford University Press:

People Magazine:

The United Nations, un.org:

Wikipedia:

3. Identify what emotions the headlines are trying to incite? Underline the words or phrases that stand out to you. Based on the information above how would you re-write these headlines to be less sensational?

a. AI could pose ‘extinction-level’ threat to humans and the US must intervene, State Dept.- commissioned report warns

b. War of words: The fight over banning books

c. TikTok will be banned without a savior. Here are the alternative apps users are flocking to

Fact Check Checklist

- ☐ The scholarly source aligns with my topic. For example, if my topic is about a period of history, is the source an expert on historical research?
- ☐ The source was written by an expert in the field or an organization that specializes in my topic.
- ☐ The audience my source seeks to address is other experts or researchers in the field.
- ☐ The source is current and has been published in the last 5 years.
- ☐ The information presented can be validated by more than one source.
- ☐ The source's purpose is clear in that they are presenting fact and data.
- ☐ My source is not attempting to persuade or sway towards a social or political cause.
- ☐ My source is not attempting to sell a product or service.
- ☐ My source is not attempting to incite emotional responses in readers.
- ☐ I have run my popular source through a reputable fact checker.
- ☐ The author is who they say they are- it is easy to impersonate, misquote, or deep fake an individual.
- ☐ My source is not AI generated. Because AI pulls from every source available online, it is difficult to determine if what AI is producing is accurate.