
MY WORLD LESSON #3

How Do Journalists Verify News?

Overview

After students have researched and gathered information from different sources, the next important step is to verify the content to distinguish fact from rumor or opinion. In this lesson, students will examine the ways journalists are expected to verify information. Students explore questions such as: What is the role of fact in journalism? How do reporters verify the information they use? And what is “fake news?” Throughout the lesson, students will learn how to be their own “fact-checkers” as they encounter news from various sources. By learning to recognize and value verification of information, students will develop critical thinking and important media literacy skills.

Target audience: English and Language Arts, Social Studies, Media Studies. Ages 11–14.

Class time: 45-60 minutes

Student handouts: “How Do Journalists Verify News?” Informational article, Facts, Rumors, and Opinions Guided Practice, Check your media literacy assessment.

Materials: Computer or tablet with internet connection and headphones, newspaper/new magazine/news website.

Class structure and pacing

1. 5 minutes Class warm-up discussion
2. 10 minutes Informational article: “How Do Journalists Verify News?”
3. 10 minutes Guided Practice: Distinguishing Fact from Rumor and Opinion
4. 20 minutes *My World* video: [“Getting the News Right”](#)
5. 10 minutes Media Literacy Assessment

Procedure

1. Begin class with a brief warm-up discussion.

■ **Open by asking for students to explain:**

- What is fact? What is a rumor? What is an opinion?
- What are the differences between these?
- What do you think is important when reporting the news?

■ **Explain that by the end of this lesson, they will be able to:**

- Distinguish between fact, opinion, and rumor.
- Identify practices of responsible fact-checking in journalism.
- Apply the principles of fact-checking to verify information.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Analyze and evaluate the factual value of a variety of statements.

Understand the process of fact-checking.

Identify examples of facts in a video broadcast.

Collaborate with peers to act as fact-checkers.

LESSON VOCABULARY

accountable *adj.* required to justify actions or decisions

ethical *adj.* behaving with honesty, truthfulness, and fairness

fact *n.* a piece of information that is known or proven to be true

fact-checker *n.* someone who verifies the factual accuracy of information

fake news *n.* an informal term commonly understood to describe news and information that has been deliberately made up for political or commercial purposes or a deliberate distribution of misinformation that imitates real news

opinion *n.* a subjective assessment or belief about something

originality *n.* the ability to think independently and creatively

rumor *n.* a currently circulating story or report of uncertain or doubtful truth

2. Using the “How Do Journalists Verify News?” Informational article, introduce students to the differences between fact, rumor, and opinion. Options for class involvement:

- **Read each section as a class. Stop after each section to note what students understand and where they may need clarification of the concepts in the article.**
- **Have students read the information individually or in pairs, and ask them to be prepared to discuss what they have read in a large group discussion.**

3. Direct students to complete the “Fact, Rumors, Opinions” worksheet, using the internet, as needed.

4. Present the BBC *My World* video segment, “Getting the News Right.”

- **Before screening, tell students to take notes and identify 3–4 facts identified by journalists in the video.**
- **After students view the video segment, survey the class and write on the board the 3 or 4 most prominent “facts” from the video.**
- **Ask students to identify some of the tools that journalists used to gather, analyze, and evaluate the information that was coming in from various mobile phones.**
- **Present students with recent headlines. Have students work in small groups to verify the facts presented with web-based or other resources.**

5. Assess what students have learned and provide an opportunity to express what they think about how and why journalists verify news.

- **Direct students to complete the assessment handout.**
- **Allow students to consult their notes and handouts if needed.**
- **Discuss the answers students have provided and provide additional instructions if necessary.**

LESSON VOCABULARY

source *n.* a person, or written, visual or audio source, that can provide information

transparency *n.* characteristic of actions, systems and organizations being purposely easily seen and scrutinized

verify *v.* make sure information is true or accurate

TIPS FROM

 Microsoft Education

Create engaging learning experiences tied to this Lesson with the following free Microsoft Education tools:

Utilize Flipgrid with this Lesson

For further discussion of focus questions, post the prompts and students can share their key learnings via [Flipgrid](#). Continue the conversation on Flipgrid!

Facilitate collaborative learning

Post warm up questions from the lesson into Teams and copy the guided practice into OneNote where students can collaborate, and seamlessly upload articles and videos to evaluate different types of news. Free education collaboration tools are at your fingertips with [Office 365](#).

Extend and connect

ELEMENTARY/PRIMARY

(ages 6–11)

Explain that there are different types of news statements. Some statements are factual—or known to be true—such as “Paris is the capital of France,” while a rumor has not been proven true yet, such as “Paris may be picked to host the Olympics,” and an opinion is someone’s beliefs or thoughts about something which cannot be proven as fact, such as “Paris is the best city for the Olympics.”

Write the labels **Fact**, **Rumor**, and **Opinion** on the board. Then help students brainstorm news topics and take turns writing or co-writing a sample fact, a rumor, and opinion about each topic. For example, for the topic math class news: Fact: Homework is due today. Rumor: There will be a surprise math quiz today. Opinion: Math is fun. Encourage a variety of news topics from the local classroom level up to national and world news. Scaffold the activity as necessary. If students struggle to think of topics, suggest topics and model creating statements. If co-writing statements is too advanced, particularly for younger students, provide simple statements and model how to categorize them as Fact, Rumor, or Opinion.

HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY

(ages 14–19)

Examine how journalists verify the news by researching the following questions: What is ethics? What does “ethical reporting” mean? What does “fake news” mean? Find examples of each type of journalism and share them with the class. Discuss the characteristics they notice about each example. Ask students to think about the challenges and pressures a journalist could face when verifying information and discuss the importance of ethics in verification.

EDUCATION STANDARDS

Media Literacy

ISTE 3b Define, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the importance and role of facts in journalism and how journalists try to act transparently and originally in creating a verifiable story.

ISTE 5a Advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.

CCSS English and Language Arts Reading Informational Texts

RI.6.8 Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

RI.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.8.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

RI.8.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS Social Studies

RH.6–8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6–8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language or opinion)

RH.6–8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

How Do Journalists Verify News?

While researching a story, journalists will uncover a variety of information from different sources. Some of this information may be true and accurate, but some of the information journalists find or are given will be inaccurate or blatantly false. Before including information in their story, a journalist has a responsibility to **verify**, or check, all facts. The first step in verification is distinguishing a fact from a rumor or an opinion:

- A **fact** contains verifiable information, information that can be proven. “The earthquake in 2001 near the coast of southern Peru measured 8.4 in magnitude” is a fact. Scientists measured the earthquake, agreed with one another, recorded the number, and reported it publicly.
- A **rumor** is an unverified statement, meaning its basis in fact is questionable until it has been proven to be true or debunked. “My friend told me that Ariana Grande doesn’t want to sing or perform anymore” is a rumor. It is unknown how or where “My friend” gathered this information.
- An **opinion** is a belief or judgment that reflects a point of view rather than a statement of fact. “Immigration should be limited to people with certain types of jobs” is an opinion. This is a statement of someone’s personal point of view. It can be disputed by other points of view, such as “Immigration should be open to people from all professions.”

Next, a journalist must find ways to corroborate, or confirm, that information is accurate and correct. Without accuracy in news reporting, people can be misled and told inaccurate information. Relying on a single source for information can lead to mistakes or reporting misleading or false information if the source turns out to be wrong. Journalists are under great pressure to report what they find out quickly, but it’s important to weigh up the merits of accuracy versus being first with a story. To prevent inaccurate information being released to the public, **ethical** journalists work hard to verify their stories before they are published and are **accountable** to the public and their peers.

How to Determine the Truth?

Transparency and **originality** are two crucial elements journalists put into place to help them remain accountable. Transparency means two things: first, that the journalist writes in a way that lets readers decide for themselves why they should believe what the journalist is saying;

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verify *v.* make sure information is true or accurate

second, the journalist doesn't try to deceive readers by leaving out or omitting facts, even if those facts disrupt the excitement or appeal of the story. And while journalists must tell what they know, they also admit what they don't know. Often, a journalist can't tell a whole story because the event is still unfolding and he or she doesn't have all of the facts, but the journalist is still acting with transparency if he or she notes that not all the facts are known yet.

The other element that keeps a news story truthful and verifiable, is its originality. A journalist's story should come from his or her own work, not someone else's, so the journalist is able to stand by it. When a journalist gets into trouble, it is often because he or she took a tip or information from someone else and did not investigate and verify it.

In addition to writing with transparency and originality, a journalist must be an excellent **fact-checker**. As a fact-checker, he or she ensures the dates, times, and names of people involved in the story are accurate. He or she must also make certain to quote his or her sources accurately. Sources may include people he or she has interviewed while writing the story and supporting research material he or she may have consulted and quoted from.

Fact-checking is a growing area within journalism. In addition to the journalists themselves, fact-checkers can also be independent reviewers or members of an editorial team. As well as helping other journalists ensure their stories are right, fact-checkers scrutinize claims, statistics and allegations made by people and organizations in the public eye, checking their accuracy.

Fake News: Telling Lies on Purpose

The term "**fake news**" refers to news deliberately created to misinform or deceive. Most often, it is created to influence someone's views for political purposes or personal gain. "Fake news," or information fabrication, has existed for centuries. Today, the ease with which anyone can publish content on the internet, and the speed at which that content can be distributed means "fake news" has become even more pervasive. Anyone can set up a blog and start posting stories with unverified information. Sometimes companies will publish advertisements that look like real news reports declaring scientific breakthroughs in weight loss or anti-aging. It is important to understand the role of verification in order to recognize when faced with fake news.

Directions: Facts, rumors, and opinions are frequently communicated in hard and soft news articles. As a discerning citizen, it is important to be able to identify the differences between such statements. Read the following statements and label each as either **FACT**, **RUMOR**, or **OPINION** in the brackets []. Where necessary, use your computer or tablet to research any of the statements.

1. The Beatles are the best-selling recording artists of all time. []
2. Renee Zellweger is moving to Scotland sometime this spring. []
3. The Mini is the best-selling car made by the British Motor Corporation. []
4. The Empire State Building weighs at least 100 times more than Big Ben. []
5. PlayStation gamers are better gamers than XBOX gamers. []
6. Coca-Cola tastes better than Pepsi soda. []
7. Tiger Woods is thinking about retiring from golf. []
8. The Summer Olympics were held in London in 1908, 1948, and 2012. []

Answer key

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8. The Summer Olympics were held in London in 1908, 1948, and 2012. [**Fact**]

Directions: As you watch “Getting the News Right,” you will need to listen carefully in order to record 3–4 factual statements that are made during the video. You do not need to write these statements out perfectly or word-for-word, but try to come as close as possible. Use the space below to write out 3–4 factual statements you hear while watching the video.

Fact #1:

Fact #2:

Fact #3:

Fact #4:

1. Which critical question must news consumers ask when determining the accuracy of a story?

- a. Does the story contain facts, opinions, or rumors?
- b. Is the story interesting, boring or complicated?
- c. Did the story happen today, yesterday, or last month?

2. What is “fake news”?

- a. News a person doesn’t agree with
- b. News that doesn’t go into enough detail
- c. News deliberately created to deceive people

3. Define the word *originality*:

4. Define the word *transparent*:

5. Name four things a journalist verifies or goes over when he or she acts as a fact-checker of his or her own news story.

6. REFLECT Recall your class discussion about the video “Getting the News Right” and the fact-checking you did with your small group (in response to the video). Answer the following questions: Were the “facts” you checked accurate and truthful? What did your group do to verify the “facts” in the video? Why is fact-checking important to journalism?

Answer key

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3. Define the word *originality*:

The ability to think independently and creatively

4. Define the word *transparent*:

Characterized by visibility or accessibility or information

5. Name four things a journalist verifies or goes over when he or she acts as a fact-checker of his or her own news story.

Dates, times, names of people involved, sources used

6. REFLECT Recall your class discussion about the video “Getting the News Right” and the fact-checking you did with your small group (in response to the video). Answer the following questions: Were the “facts” you checked accurate and truthful? What did your group do to verify the “facts” in the video? Why is fact-checking important to journalism?

Responses will vary. Accept all reasonable answers.
