

## Fake News Investigation and Evaluation

*Real, truthful news and fake, false news differ dramatically in quality and reliability, although it can be difficult to clearly distinguish between them in many online environments. The following activities are designed to develop your skills and perspectives as a fake news investigator and critical news evaluator.*

People get news today from sources ranging from television, social media (e.g., Twitter, TikTok) and legacy news outlets (i.e., *New York Times*, *Washington Post*) as well as teachers, parents, family members, and peers. Yet, there is a real difference in quality and reliability between **real news** and **fake news**.

Fake news resembles real news in form (it typically has headlines, images, quotes, and a news-like look on screens), but not in how it is produced organizationally. Real news is derived following the standards and rules of journalism. It is fact-based and fact-checked from verified sources. It is presented objectively and truthfully in a journalistic style of writing. It is independent of political or corporate influences. Fake news, by contrast, is just what the term says – information that is intentionally false and misleading (Molina, et al., 2021).

[Misinformation and Disinformation: Thinking Critically about Information Sources](#) from the College of Staten Island offers a further explanation of fake news and misleading, unreliable and deliberately false information.

Given the amount of fake and false news online and in print, every individual must become their own fact checker and news analyst - determining for themselves what is credible and reliable information and what is fake and false misinformation.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

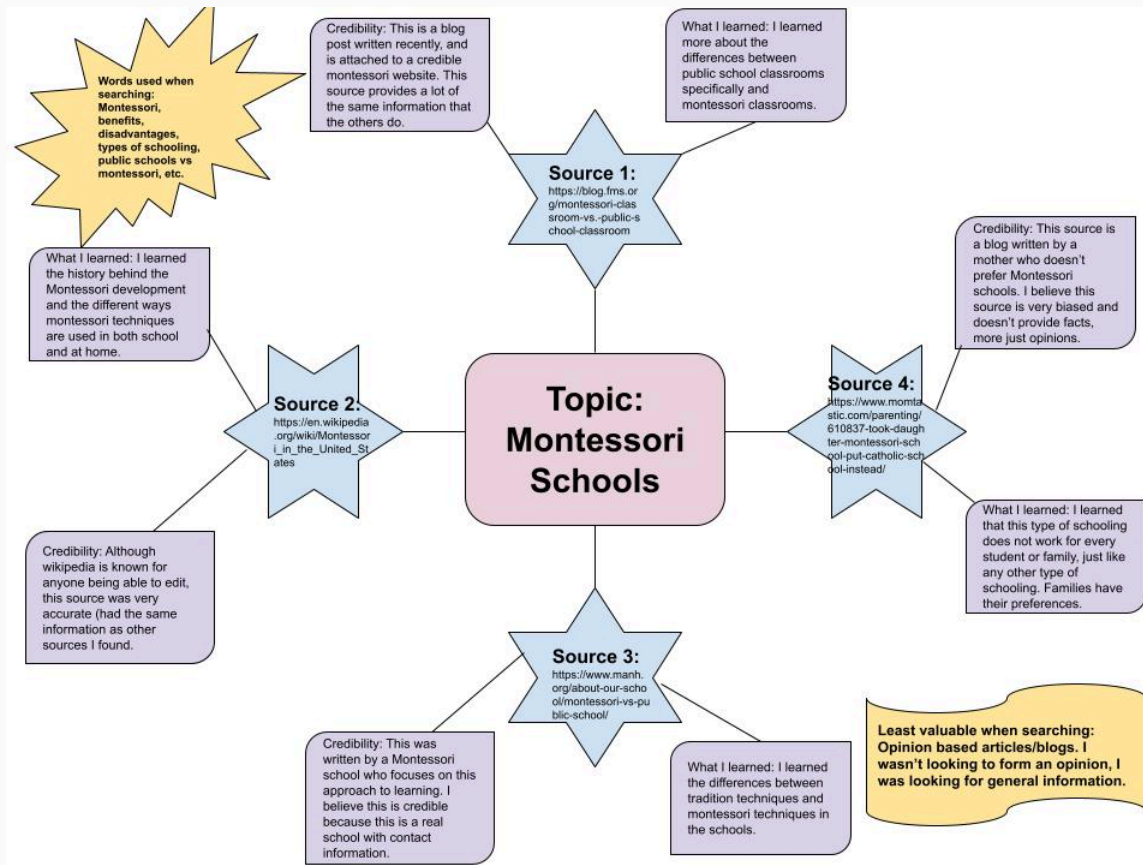
You can get more background information from Topic 7.4 [Social Media, Digital News, and the Spread of Misinformation](#) and Topic 7.5 [Evaluating Print and Online Media](#) in our *Building Democracy for All* eBook.

## Activity 1: Analyze Your Online Search Habits

- Pick a topic that you don't know much about. Spend 20 minutes investigating and researching it. Find out anything and everything about this topic.
- Then, look through your search history.
  - What words did you use in your search?
  - What sorts of news sources did you tend to seek out?
  - What did you find the most or least valuable during your search process?
  - How did you determine whether a source was credible or not?
- **Create a mindmap that provides a visual overview** of your search process (see examples below).
  - Include boxes on your mindmap for each site you visited. Add details to each box, such as whether you consider the site credible and what you learned from the site.
  - Mindmap Tools: [Google Drawings](#), [MindMup](#), pencil and paper, & [more tools](#).
- Compare and contrast your mindmap with those of your classmates.

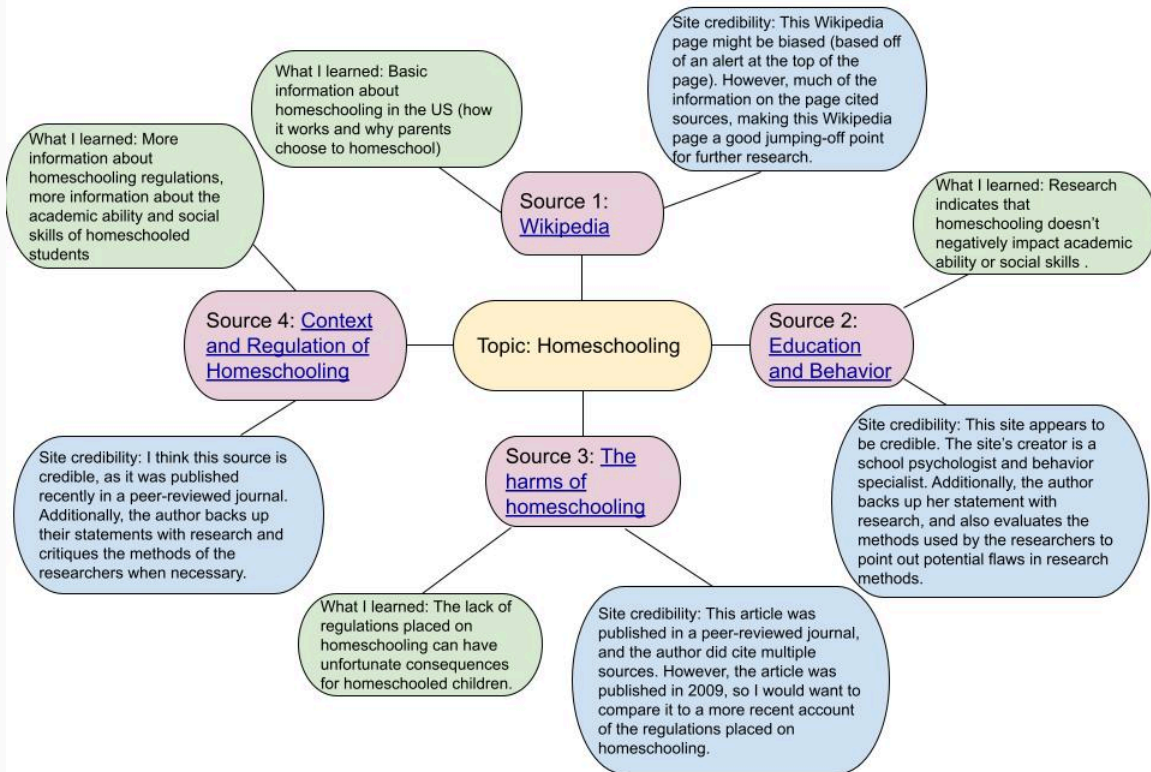
## Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

Example Mindmap for the Search Topic "Montessori Schools" by Kayleigh Francis:



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Example Mindmap for the Search Topic "Homeschooling" by Sara Shea:



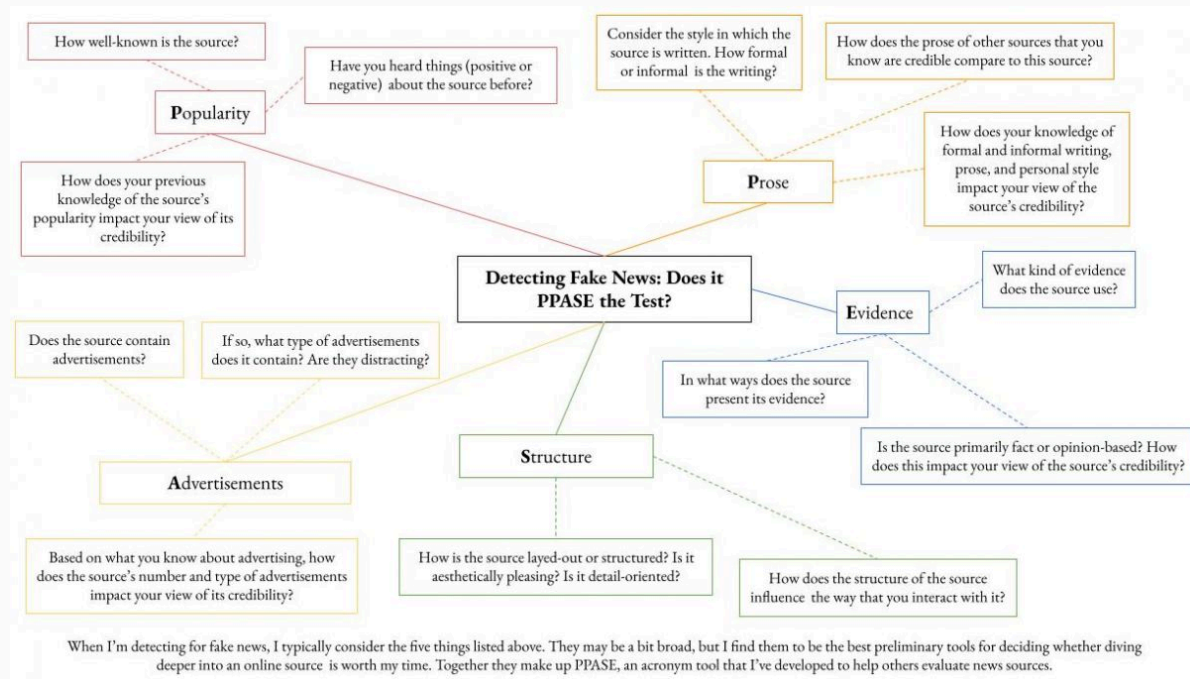
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## Activity 2: Create a News Evaluation Tool

- Take the [National News Literacy Week misinformation quiz](#).
- Consider the following questions:
  - How do you determine if a news story or social media news post contains misinformation?
  - What would you tell someone who didn't know anything about how to tell if a source is credible to look for when evaluating news articles and social media posts?
  - How would you explain credible news sources to your parents, grandparents, siblings, or friends?
- **Create a rubric, checklist, or other instructional tool** (e.g., [podcast](#), video) to help others evaluate news sources (see example mindmap below).

## Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

Example News Evaluation Tool by Sophia Hajjar:



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Example News Evaluation Tool by Grace McAlpine:

**Detecting Fake News:  
Analyzing the Press using the PRESS method!**

<b>Picture:</b> Is there a picture involved with the post or article?	Some questions to ask yourself when analyzing a photo: 1. Could anyone have made this photo? - this could be things like basic memes, pictures of quotes, etc. 2. Could this photo be taken out of context? - A lot of times, photos might not actually prove anything and the post itself supplements the photo. Reverse image search to see when the photo is actually from and if it pertains to a different topic. 3. Could this photo be manipulated or fabricated? - Basic editing software and the rise of Artificial Intelligence allows users to manipulate existing photos or create completely new images.
<b>Reposting:</b> Is the information being reposted? Who is reposting it?	Who is reposting the information? A friend who notoriously gets swept up in misinformation? Your grandfather who has wildly opposing political views from yourself? A politician who constantly contradicts themselves? The people reposting information and articles can be very telling if something is misinformation!
<b>Evidence:</b> Does the information cite sources or provide general evidence?	Is the information presented in a way where the author is simply just stating their own opinion with no evidence to back it up? Blog posts and tweets can not always be taken as truth. Make sure that the source cites research articles or references articles from notoriously credible sources.
<b>Source:</b> Does the information originate from a reliable source?	Is the information coming from a notoriously reliable source? Reliable news source examples include The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New Yorker, and PBS just to name a few. Make sure that the information is originating from a credible source that has proven its credibility time and time again in the past.
<b>Structure:</b> How is the information presented?	The devil is in the details - make sure to pay attention to ads that may show up, how the URL is spelled, where other links on the site may bring you to. If anything seems a little off-putting or incorrect, this may point to misinformation!

## Activity 3: Evaluate the Benefits and Challenges of Getting Political News on Social Media to a Democratic Society

Nearly half of adults ages 18 to 29 in this country get their political news mostly on social media. The figure is 1-in-5 across all age groups. Those getting political news from social media also tend to be less well-informed about political issues and policies ([Pew Research Center](#), July 30, 2020).

- Conduct Internet research and survey friends and family about the potential benefits and drawbacks of getting news from social media. Specifically, consider the following prompts:
  - What do you see as the potential benefits of getting news from social media?
  - What might be the potential drawbacks of getting news from social media?
    - What can be done to address these drawbacks?
  - How does getting news from social media influence democracy?
- **Design a news report video to share your findings.**

### Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Evaluate the Benefits and Challenges of Digital News and Social Media to a Democratic Society](#) by Maria Trifiro



## Activity 4: Investigate Twitter's Blue Check Verification Policy

Twitter (now X) was an important source of political news for many social media users, and the nature of information on the site has changed dramatically since Elon Musk became owner and CEO in late October 2022. Musk changed the site's "blue check" verification policy that previously served as a way for users to confirm that authentic information came from actual people or organizations.



[Twitter verified badge](#) | Public Domain

Under the new policy, only X Premium accounts can receive a blue check mark verifying the account is authentic. This means users are required to pay for verification status ([Twitter Is Officially Ending Its Old Verification Process on April 1](#), *CBSNews*, March 24, 2023).

Many individuals and organizations have refused to do so, and, as a result, it has become even easier for those posting on Twitter to impersonate other people, to claim to be a public agency or local politician or government official, or to present totally false and politically damaging information. Essentially anyone can post anything and users are left to decide for themselves what is true and what is not.

- As a class, **create your own system for verifying the trustworthiness of the people and organizations on Twitter.**
  - How would you go about identifying authentic versus deceptive and unreliable users on Twitter?
  - How would you go about differentiating between real users and bots?
  - Which people and organizations should you trust on Twitter for finding political news? Why should you trust them?

## Additional Resources

- Molina, M.D., Sundar, S., Le, T., & Lee, D. (2021). ["Fake news" is not simply false information: A concept explication and taxonomy of online content](#). *American Behavioral Scientist*, 65(2): 180-212.
- [Teens, social media and technology 2018](#)
- [What is News Literacy? & How to Teach It](#)
- ["Disinformation, Fake News, and Influence Campaigns on Twitter](#)
- [Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election](#)
- [What are deep fakes?](#)
- [What's Going On In This Photo?](#) (NYTimes Visual Literacy Series)
- [Fake News. It's Complicated](#)
- [The Great Hack \(2019\)](#)
- Fact-Checking Sites
  - [Fact Check.org](#)
  - [Michigan Truth Squad](#)
  - [Project Vote Smart](#)
  - [ProPublica](#)

## Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Social Media, Digital News, and the Spread of Misinformation](#)

## Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
  - *Evaluate the benefits and challenges of digital news and social media to a democratic society.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T7.4]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
  - Knowledge Constructor
    - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
    - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data, or other resources.
    - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
  - Creative Communicator
    - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
    - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
    - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
  - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
  - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
  - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
  - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8





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