

Is it legit?

Five steps for vetting a news source

Many sources compete for attention online, including partisan blogs and bogus sites posing as legitimate news organizations. It can be tough to know what to trust. Follow these steps to cut through the noise and learn how to evaluate sources for signs of credibility – as well as for red flags that signal a source should be avoided.

Test your source savvy!

Scan this QR code to put your source-vetting skills to the test.



1



Do a quick search

Conducting a simple search for information about a news source is a key first step in evaluating its credibility. It's important to look beyond social media. Go to a search engine and plug in the name of the website or publication. Do other legitimate sources, such as standards-based news organizations or [fact-checking websites](#), describe this publication as unreliable? Satirical? Is it a state-run propaganda "news" site? If so, there's no need to spend more time vetting. Look elsewhere for reliable information.

➤ **Tip:** Wikipedia can be a good place to start and lead you to relevant source links; just keep in mind that some credible local newsrooms may not have an entry there. You can also see if a source has been vetted for inclusion on news aggregators, such as [Google News](#), [Apple News](#) and [SmartNews](#).

2



Look for standards

Reputable news organizations aspire to ethical guidelines and standards, including fairness, accuracy and independence. These standards should be available publicly – often in the form of editorial policies or a code of ethics. Look for evidence that a source follows such standards. If someone is mentioned in a critical story, for instance, did the journalist give that person a chance to comment?

➤ **Note:** Some professional journalism standards are commonly shared across the industry, such as the [Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics](#). Other policies are unique to different newsrooms.

Beware of these trust busters!

If you spot any of these problems, look elsewhere for credible news.

✗ **False or untrue content:**
Publishing a demonstrably false claim without correcting it

✗ **Clickbait tactics:**
"Baiting" you with sensationalized language, including misleading or exaggerated headlines, or headlines that are purposely vague to drive clicks

✗ **Lack of balance:**
Consistently focusing on one angle or side of a legitimate debate or controversy, while ignoring or distorting other perspectives

✗ **Manipulated images or videos**
Tip: You can do a [reverse image search](#) using

[Google](#), [TinEye](#)

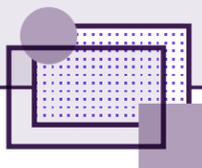
and [Yandex](#)

(among other tools) to see if visuals have been misrepresented or altered in some way.

✗ **State-run or state-sponsored propaganda:**
Using government-controlled news organizations to further national agendas and improve public image

✗ **Dangerous, offensive and malicious content:**
Could include discriminatory language, unverified pseudoscience, content that promotes violence or coverage that – as the SPJ Code of Ethics states – panders "to lurid curiosity"

3

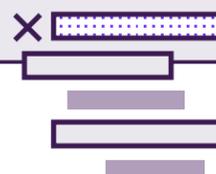


Check for transparency

Quality news sources should be transparent, not only about their reporting practices (see Step 2), but also about their ownership and funding. Is it clear who owns and runs this website or publication? Is advertising labeled responsibly? Can you tell who is writing and producing content? Is there a way to contact newsroom editors and reporters?

➤ **Remember:** "About" pages can provide some of these details, but they can also be misleading and omit important information (about a source's ownership or lack of independence, for example). [Don't be fooled](#) by a [sleek web design](#), or trust the "About" page on an unfamiliar site without further verification. If something seems suspicious, check it out.

4



Examine how errors are handled

Credible news sources are accountable for mistakes and correct them. Do you see evidence that this source corrects or clarifies errors?

5



Assess news coverage

An important step in vetting sources is taking time to read and assess several news articles: Do you see original reporting? Do they provide straight news reports, or just commentary and opinion? Are there grammatical and/or spelling errors? How do news articles from this source compare to coverage from other standards-based newsrooms on this same topic? Many people have strong opinions about news sources without evaluating them firsthand.

➤ **Tip:** Take note of bylines (names) on news coverage. These bylines can help you confirm that this coverage was written or produced by professional journalists. Bylines are also a sign of transparency and accountability.

News Literacy Project



SmartNews

This infographic was created by the **News Literacy Project** in partnership with **SmartNews**, a news app for mobile devices.

For a future founded on facts [newslit.org](#)