

Identifying Reliable Sources

40 minutes

Digital Media Literacy

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

In this lesson, you'll learn how to evaluate online information by understanding what makes a source reliable. Follow step-by-step guidance to spot red flags, use a practical checklist, and practise assessing sources through engaging activities and reflection.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Understand the importance of source reliability in online research.
- Identify key characteristics of reliable and unreliable sources.
- Recognise common red flags indicating poor-quality information.
- Apply a structured checklist to evaluate the credibility of sources.
- Develop critical thinking skills through practical evaluation and reflection.

BEFORE THE LESSON

- A device per pupil or per pair with a working browser, since the checklist and sample-headline activity are screen-based.
- A large screen or projector so you can work through one sample headline together before pupils try the rest.
- Decide where pupils record their reflection answers: these are for talking through, so plan to take them as a spoken discussion rather than written work.

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HOW THE LESSON RUNS

Introduction

What is a Reliable Source?

Spotting Red Flags

Your Evaluation Checklist

Activity: Evaluate Sample Headlines

Reflection: Your Trusted Sources

HTTPS

Wrap-Up

TEACHING MOVES

1. Introduction. Open with a quick show of hands: who has ever found something online that turned out to be wrong? Use one real example to set up why checking matters.
2. What is a Reliable Source? Draw out the features as a class list: checked facts, named expert authors, trusted organisations. Ask pupils to name a source they think fits each one.
3. Spotting Red Flags. Name each red flag aloud and ask pupils to give an example they have seen, especially clickbait headlines. Keep it concrete rather than abstract.
4. Your Evaluation Checklist. Walk through all five checklist questions once yourself, then have pupils keep the checklist visible for the next activity rather than trying to memorise it.
5. Activity: Evaluate Sample Headlines. Model the checklist on the first Bigfoot headline together, then release pupils to work the rest. Circulate and ask why they rated each one as they did.
6. Reflection: Your Trusted Sources. Run this as a spoken discussion. Ask pupils to name sources they trust for homework or news and defend one choice using the checklist.
7. HTTPS. Show pupils where the padlock and https appear in the address bar. Stress that HTTPS means a safe connection, not that the content is automatically true.
8. Wrap-Up. Ask pupils to recall the five checklist questions from memory as a class. Close by agreeing one habit they will use next time they research online.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Pupils assume that a site with HTTPS or a padlock is automatically reliable for information. Separate the two ideas clearly: HTTPS protects the connection, not the truth of the content. Show that a well-made but biased site can still use HTTPS.
- Pupils treat anything that appears high in search results, or looks professional, as trustworthy. Point out that ranking and slick design do not equal accuracy. Push them back to the checklist: who wrote it, and can the facts be checked?
- Pupils think a source is unreliable only if it is obviously fake or silly. Use the Bigfoot examples to show that plausible-sounding sources can still fail on authorship or evidence. Reliability is about checkable facts, not tone.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Emerging: Give them just the first checklist question, who is the author, and let them apply that one to two headlines before adding the rest. Pair them with a partner and have them talk through each source aloud rather than working alone.
- Developing: Ask them to justify each rating using a specific checklist question rather than a general feeling. Have them explain one of their judgements back to you before moving on.
- Proficient: Ask them to rank the sample sources from most to least reliable and defend the order. Challenge them to find a genuine red flag on a source they use for homework and share it with the class.