

Digital Skills for Democracy

Assessing online information
to make civic choices



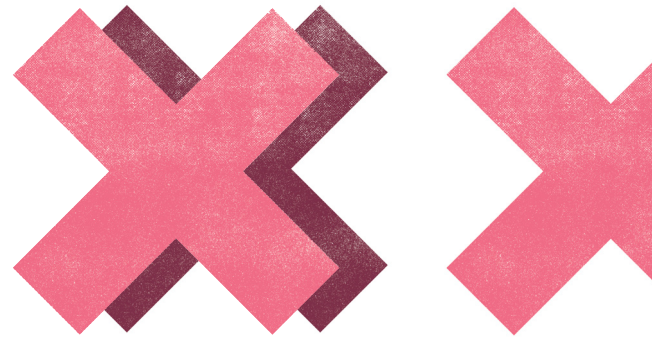
Digital Skills for Democracy

Big idea

Citizens need to be well informed to make good decisions when it comes to political issues, especially when they are deciding how to vote in a federal election. We all need to make sure we can trust news and other information that might help us make up our minds when it comes to voting.

Inquiry question:

How can we find out if information about elections or political issues is something we can trust?



Overall description

This activity can be used in a social studies, civics, citizenship or language arts class.

In this activity, students

- think about the importance of making sure they have trustworthy information before they make a decision on a political or electoral issue
- explore a series of scenarios designed to teach five strategies for verifying information: find the original, verify the source, check other information, read fact checking articles, and turn to places you trust
- reflect on the impact of false and misleading information in politics

× Time needed

60 min

× Competencies and skills

- Students will think critically about online information.
- Students will understand the importance of verifying information about political and election issues.
- Students will learn and practise skills for verifying online information.
- Students will learn about trustworthy sources for information on election issues, including the Elections Canada website and social media channels.

× Materials

- True or False? (page 13)
- Five Digital Strategies (page 14)
- Teacher Summary (pages 10–11)
- Round 1 Scenario Cards (five scenarios)*
- Round 2 Scenario Cards (five scenarios)*
- Graphic Organizer: Record Your Thinking (page 15)
- Exit Card (page 16)
- Optional Assessment Rubric (page 17)

* In your kit or online at electionsanddemocracy.ca



Instructions

× Minds on

10 min

Ask students: How can we tell if we can trust information we find online?

Select 10 students. Invite each one to read a statement to the class from the *True or False?* handout. (Or read the statements to the class yourself.)

After each statement has been read, invite the class to guess whether it is true or false. When all of the facts have been read, give students these answers:

-
- ✓ Shakespeare invented the name “Jessica.” **True**

 - × Hippo milk is blue. **False: it is pink**

 - ✓ Mammoths were still alive when the Egyptians built the Great Pyramid of Giza. **True**

 - ✓ Scientists have found 100,000 golf balls in Loch Ness. **True**

 - × The Canadian Space Agency invented the Dust Buster vacuum cleaner. **False**

 - ✓ The first owner of the *Mona Lisa* hung it in his bathroom. **True**

 - ✓ Sonic the Hedgehog’s middle name is Maurice. **True**

 - × The magnetic field at Magnetic Hill, New Brunswick, makes cars roll uphill. **False: an optical illusion makes it look like cars are rolling uphill when they are actually rolling downhill**

 - ✓ All kangaroos are left-handed. **Mostly true: grey and red kangaroos, the two largest species, are nearly all left-handed**

Invite the class to reflect: How well did they do at guessing? Was there any way to tell the true facts from the false ones?

Tell students that this exercise shows how difficult it can be to figure out whether things are true or false without doing more research. This is especially true about things we learn from the Internet, because almost anyone can create and spread believable-looking content online. News and other online content often comes to us indirectly, sometimes through sources we trust (like friends or family). We can't just trust our gut or rely on our own instincts when we are judging online content.

Tell students that there are two kinds of false information online:

- *Misinformation* – when people share something they think is true but isn't
- *Disinformation* – when people share false or misleading information on purpose

Tell students that in this lesson, they will find out about some key strategies to help them avoid being tricked by false and misleading information. Give them the *Five Digital Strategies* handout and review the five strategies together.

- 1. Find the original**
- 2. Verify the source**
- 3. Check other information**
- 4. Read fact-checking articles**
- 5. Turn to places you trust**

Point out that we must follow these steps when we get information online about politics or elections. This information can influence how we make important civic choices, including voting.

✘ Activity

40 min

Students will do two rounds of fact-checking simulations in small groups.

Divide the class into five teams. Each team will work with one of the five scenarios. Explain that there will be two rounds of fact-checking simulations.

- In the first round, students will explore a fictional scenario to show them how to use the strategies.
- In the second round, they will explore a real scenario so they can practise the strategies and see how they would work in real life.

Students will record their thinking during each round. At the end of each round, they will share if and how their thinking changed as they found more information about the scenario.

Teacher Tip: You can assign students roles within their teams, such as card master, recorder(s), reporter and reader (or students can do this themselves).

Teacher Tip: If students would find it helpful, model one scenario for the class before teams begin their work.

Round 1: Fictional Scenarios

Give each team at least one copy of the graphic organizer. Tell them that each time they get a card (A to E), they will make a record of their thinking to show how trustworthy they think the information is. Each new card may change what they think, but they should always evaluate the information in the first card (A). Each team may designate one or more recorders who will write down the team's thinking.

Give each team its scenario card (A) for Round 1. Tell them that each card contains a possible scenario where they might need to verify information about a political issue or about the election process in Canada. One student reads the card aloud to their team. Then the team ranks the level of trustworthiness on the graphic organizer and explains their thinking in the space provided.

Now give each team the next three cards (B, C, D). These are the strategy cards for their scenario. You can give them one at a time yourself, or you can give them all to a student designated as the card master.

A student should first read the card aloud. The team will discuss and consider whether the card changes the trustworthiness ranking they gave to the scenario. They then record their thinking on the graphic organizer before they read and discuss the next card.

Teacher Tip: If you are handing out the cards, you could have students try to guess which strategy will be used next and why.

Once they have read all three strategy cards (B, C, D) and completed the graphic organizer, hand out the answer card (E). A student in each team reads it aloud and the team gives a final ranking and explanation of their assessment.

Then give teams a few minutes to prepare to share their scenario with the class. If roles were assigned, the student designated as the reporter will speak for the team.

Each team will

- read its scenario aloud
- share its final trustworthiness ranking
- share which strategy was the most helpful

Round 2: Real-Life Scenarios

Now tell students that this isn't just a make-believe situation. More and more, people are getting their information about elections and politics from online sources, such as social media. They cannot be sure they can trust the information.

Distribute the Round 2 scenario cards. Tell students that each scenario is based on real-life examples of political or election information that people have had to evaluate online. Give students a second copy of the graphic organizer and have them repeat the process from Round 1.

✘ Consolidation

10 min

Give teams a few minutes to prepare to share their Round 2 scenario with the class. If roles were assigned, the student designated as the reporter will speak for the team.

Each team will again

- read its scenario aloud
- share its final trustworthiness ranking
- share which strategy was the most helpful

Ask students these questions:

- What do you think is the best way to respond to false or misleading information online?
- What surprised you the most about the activity?
- How do you think misinformation and disinformation could affect our elections?

Explain to students that it is our responsibility to detect misinformation and disinformation and to help keep it from spreading by not sharing or “liking” it. This is especially important in an election period, when false or misleading information could influence the way people vote.

A couple of minutes before students leave class, give out the exit card and have them complete the following sentence prompts:

1. *One thing I learned was...*
2. *The next time I want to find out if something online is true, I will...*
3. *To be an engaged and informed citizen in a democracy, it's important to...*

✘ Optional extension activities

- Have teams search the Internet or their social media channels for news stories that seem fishy or too good to be true. They are to verify whether the stories are real by using the strategies they learned in this lesson. Then have them pass the article to another team as a challenge to see if that team is able to find the answer.
- Show students how to do a reverse-image search on a site such as tineye.com.
- Show students how to use fact-checking websites such as snopes.com and AFP Fact Check Canada (factcheck.afp.com/afp-canada)



Background information

For teachers

✘ Teacher Summary

Below are brief summaries of the scenarios and strategies used in the Round 1 and Round 2 activities.

Scenarios: Round 1	Strategies used
<p>✘ Wolves</p> <p>The biggest local issue in the upcoming election is a plan to reintroduce wolves to the nearby national park to help control the deer population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Check other information • Verify the source
<p>✘ Weather</p> <p>Your friend sends you a news story saying that voting has been delayed until tomorrow because of bad weather.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn to places you trust • Find the original • Verify the source
<p>✘ University</p> <p>The first election you're eligible to vote in is coming up, but you're away at university and you're not sure where you can vote.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Verify the source • Turn to places you trust
<p>✘ Prime Minister</p> <p>You see a social media post saying that although you have to be 18 to vote in federal elections in Canada, you can vote for the prime minister if you are 14 or older.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Turn to places you trust • Turn to places you trust
<p>✘ Protest</p> <p>A week before an election, a photo on social media shows the leading candidate at a protest held by a group that encourages violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Check other information • Turn to places you trust

Scenarios: Round 2	Strategies used
<p>✘ Flag</p> <p>In 2016, the government of the United Kingdom held a referendum about whether the UK should leave the European Union. In 2018, this video of a man failing to burn an EU flag was a widely shared meme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Verify the source • Check other information
<p>✘ Bridge</p> <p>You see a tweet claiming that the Venezuelan government has blockaded a bridge that would have been used to ship food aid from Colombia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Check other information • Read fact-checking articles
<p>✘ Delay</p> <p>You see a tweet that says voting hours will be extended in today's election.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Verify the source • Turn to places you trust
<p>✘ Selfie</p> <p>You're looking forward to sharing your first time voting with everyone in your social media network. Then you see a Reddit post saying it's illegal to post a selfie of your ballot.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Verify the source • Turn to places you trust
<p>✘ Texting</p> <p>In the lead-up to the 2016 US presidential election, many tweets were shared saying that you can vote from home by text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the original • Turn to places you trust • Read fact-checking articles



Materials

To be photocopied

× True or False?

Statement	TRUE	FALSE
1. Shakespeare invented the name “Jessica.”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Hippo milk is blue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Mammoths were still alive when the Egyptians built the Great Pyramid of Giza.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Scientists have found 100,000 golf balls in Loch Ness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The Canadian Space Agency invented the Dust Buster vacuum cleaner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The first owner of the Mona Lisa hung it in his bathroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Sonic the Hedgehog’s middle name is Maurice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The magnetic field at Magnetic Hill, New Brunswick, makes cars roll uphill.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. All kangaroos are left-handed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

× Five Digital Strategies

It may seem hard to tell what's true online and what isn't true. Here are five simple strategies you can use to help you.

1. Find the original

A lot of stories are shared on social media. It's important to find the original source so you can decide how much you can trust it.

2. Verify the source

How trustworthy is the source you've found? Do an online search to see whether other people or groups think it can be trusted.

3. Check other information

Don't rely on just one source. Look at how the story is being covered by different trusted news outlets and organizations.

4. Read fact-checking articles

You don't have to do everything yourself! Find fact-checking articles at sites like snopes.com and AFP Fact Check (factcheck.afp.com/afp-canada).

5. Turn to places you trust

Some sources give you a reason to trust them: they are authorities on a certain topic or have a good track record for accuracy.

✘ Graphic organizer: Record your thinking

Use this worksheet to record your thinking. Each time you read a new card and get new information, mark an X in one of the boxes to rate how trustworthy you think the story is. Explain your rating in the space provided.

Card	How trustworthy do you think the story is? 1 = not at all, 5 = completely					Explain your rating
	1	2	3	4	5	
Card A Scenario						
Card B Strategy						
Card C Strategy						
Card D Strategy						
Card E Answer						

× Exit Card

1. One thing I learned was...
 2. The next time I want to find out if something online is true, I will...
 3. To be an engaged and informed citizen in a democracy, it's important to...
-

× Exit Card

1. One thing I learned was...
2. The next time I want to find out if something online is true, I will...
3. To be an engaged and informed citizen in a democracy, it's important to...

✘ Elections Canada Civic Education Assessment Rubric

Task: Digital Skills for Democracy

Student name: _____ Group: _____

	Absent / Incomplete	Level 1 (Below expectations)	Level 2 (Approaches expectations)	Level 3 (Meets expectations)	Level 4 (Exceeds expectations)
Understanding Content (e.g., ideas, opinions, concepts, relationships among facts)		Demonstrates limited understanding of content	Demonstrates some understanding of content	Demonstrates considerable understanding of content	Demonstrates thorough understanding of content
Understanding Context(s) (e.g., relationship of content to big ideas, such as “fairness,” “democracy,” and “inclusion vs. exclusion;” themes; frameworks)		Demonstrates limited understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates some understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates considerable understanding of context(s)	Demonstrates thorough understanding of context(s)
Applying Critical Thinking Skills (e.g., analyzing, evaluating, inferring, interpreting, revising, refining, reviewing, reflecting, forming conclusions, detecting bias, synthesizing)		Uses critical thinking skills with limited effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with some effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with considerable effectiveness	Uses critical thinking skills with a high degree of effectiveness
Using Collaborative Group Learning Skills (e.g., communication skills, questioning, active listening, problem solving, focus on task, level of engagement, teamwork)		Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with limited effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with some effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with considerable effectiveness	Shows communication skills and collaborative group learning skills with a high degree of effectiveness
Demonstrating Civic Disposition (e.g., respects diversity of opinion, recognizes that rights come with responsibilities, considers what is good for society as a whole)		Expresses few civic dispositions	Expresses some civic dispositions	Expresses many civic dispositions	Expresses a considerable number and range of civic dispositions

Comments:

Learn more

If you and your students enjoyed this lesson, we encourage you to use Elections Canada's other educational resources. These cross-curricular materials can be taught in a variety of subjects, including history, geography, social studies, civics and math.

All resources are available in English and French, and there are versions for language learners.

Visit electionsanddemocracy.ca to browse our complete list, download or order. You can also contact us using the information beside.

Contact us

To share comments or ask questions, or if some of your kit components are missing, write or call us:

Email: info@elections.ca

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