# Authentication 101
## – tip sheet

Did you know that almost a quarter of adults have shared a false news story, and that we're **least** likely to fact-check news and other things that come to us through people we know and trust on social networks (even though for many people these are their **most** common sources of news)?

Everyone – online platforms, news organizations, individuals and civil society – has an important part to play in keeping hoaxes and false news from spreading by making sure that something is reliable before we share it. This tip sheet focuses on what individuals can do to recognize false content online.

So when should you double-check before sharing something you find online? You don't have to try to debunk **everything** that comes to you, but you should ask yourself these questions before you share, tag, retweet or forward:

- Could someone base an important decision (about their health, their career, travel, etc.) on this?
- Is it about a hot or controversial issue?
- Does this seem "too good to be true"? Is it something that you hope is real or would really like to believe?

*If the answer to **any** of these questions is "Yes", then double-check the story to see if it is true!*

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**Here's an update to the classic "5 Ws" to help you.**

## WHAT kinds of false content should I watch out for?

There are many different kinds of false information being spread around. Before you buy into something (or share it), make sure it isn't one of these:

- *Hoaxes and false news*: These are spread on purpose to mislead people. Sometimes these are motivated by malicious or mischievous intent; sometimes they are motivated for ideological or political purposes; other times they're done for financial gain.
- *Scams*: Sometimes the purpose of a fake story is to separate you from your money, to get you to give up your personal information, or to get you to click on a link that will download malware onto your computer.
- *Ads*: Some things that are spread around are obviously ads, but others are disguised as "real" content.

Legitimate satire and parody content from sites like The Onion and The Beaverton are fun and entertaining, but should not be confused with actual news!

## WHY is it being spread around?

Is it trying to scare you? To make you laugh? To make you angry? Does it **use emotionally-loaded words or images to** get a rise out of you?

Be especially wary of stories you want to believe. Some fake news sources target you with stories they think you'll hope are true to get you to click and spread them.

## WHO is spreading it? Do they have a good track record for accuracy?

Adults are more likely to trust the content of a story if it was shared by someone they trust, so always track it back to the *original* poster. If the person who shared it with you didn't give a source, do a search for it. But **don't** assume that a newspaper, TV network or online news site is the original source.

Once you've established the source, find out who they are and why they might be a valid source for what they're spreading:

- If it claims to be from a newspaper or other news source, do a search to make sure it really exists. Check the Web address to make sure it's the right one for the real website.
- If it's a science or health story, is the author a real expert? Do a search on their name and see what comes up.
- If it's a photo of something that's happening in a particular place, do they really live there?
- Have they posted on this subject before? If not, be cautious.
- Do they post a lot of spreadable stuff? If so, be cautious.

You can also look at the source's **network**. Are they connected mostly to:

- People and groups who all have similar opinions?
- Advertisers?
- People and groups who have no connection to the thing they're spreading?
- Nobody?

*If the answer to **any** of these is "Yes", be cautious!*

## WHEN did it start spreading?

A lot of things get spread more than once, like some of the photos of flooding that go around every time there's a big storm. You can do a *reverse image search* to see if a photo has been posted before, or search a description of the photo like *subway station shark*.

How long has the original poster's account been active? If an account appears new or recently started posting with no prior history, be cautious.

And don't forget to be extra-careful about anything that's posted on April 1st!

## WHERE else can I find out if something is real?

- Do a search for the subject with the words "hoax", "fake", "viral" or "scam", as in "shark subway station hoax"

- For pictures, you can do a reverse search for images at TinEye (www.tineye.com). This will tell you where else the picture has appeared, and also show you *similar* pictures (which is a good way to find out if a picture has been photoshopped). TinEye can also be installed as a browser plugin, so you can check a picture just by right-clicking it.

- Check out hoax-busting sites like Snopes. You can go to www.snopes.com or do a site search, like this: "shark subway station site:www.snopes.com"

- There are a number of good videos to help you dive deeper in the subject. The BBC has a great video on fake news here and the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania has another good primer here.

- Finally, the Columbia Journalism Review has published a guide on what legitimate news looks like – and what fake news doesn't: http://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-real-news-list.php