

Start with Healthy Skepticism

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article (Nov 21, 2016) shared the findings of a Stanford University research study: most students don't know when news is fake.

The research studied “nearly 8,000 students (from grammar school through college)” and examined their abilities to differentiate between news and opinions and to examine source bias. For example, a majority of students “couldn't see any valid reason to mistrust a post written by a bank executive arguing that young adults need more financial-planning help.” The full [WSJ article](#) can be read here, and the Stanford research report [Executive Summary can be found on this site](#).

For those who assign research projects or who teach critical thinking skills, Stanford has developed activities and assessments that can be shared with students to generate discussion. These assessments and activities examine the following:

- Evaluating an article
- Researching a controversial claim
- Determining website reliability
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses in online videos
- Evaluating social media claims (from page six of the executive summary).

Sample assessment activities, along with rubrics and explanations, can be found on pages 9, 16, and 21-22 of the [Executive Study](#) and are easy to print and use in class. These kinds of discussions may be particularly important early in the semester before assigning research projects and papers. Additionally, the article argues that librarians' expertise in media and information literacy cannot be undervalued and can be greatly beneficial to both faculty and students.

The *WSJ* article states, “by age 18, 88% of young adults regularly get news from *Facebook* and other social media, according to a 2015 study of 1,045 adults ages 18 to 34 by the Media Insight Project.” In recommendations that are relevant to all of us, the article suggests the following:

- “Rather than trusting the ‘about’ section of a website to learn about it, [use]...‘lateral reading’—leaving the website almost immediately after landing on it and research the organization or author.”
- Realize that “a top ranking on Google doesn't mean an article is trustworthy. The rankings are based on several factors, including popularity,” and readers “should learn to evaluate sources' reliability based on whether they're named, independent and well-informed or authoritative.”
- When using social media sites, “Posts should cite multiple sources, and the information should be verifiable elsewhere.”

A teaching tip submitted by

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