

Countering Misinformation

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No matter where you're situated on the political spectrum, you doubtlessly have loud voices telling you to watch out for unreliable information or "fake news". Some of those voices are from your past: parents, priests, and schoolteachers. Other voices are current: journalists, politicians, entertainers, and neighbors. We're all formed by the encounters and experiences we've had, and our worldview shapes how we receive new information. An important task of any mindful person is to sift what we hear to discern what's actually true.

One of the best tools we have in countering misinformation is a healthy dose of skepticism. Don't take things at face value. Seek confirmation elsewhere, especially when it too closely matches your hopes or when it seems too good to be true. Lots of people benefit from our unexamined belief. Even sources we trust need verification; every source has a bias, even if you agree with it. Look for confirmation from multiple, unrelated sources.

Another important skill is finding the origin of information. The best accounts are primary sources, people reporting on themselves or events they personally witnessed. Those that have objective measurements—like scientists—or get independent evaluation—like peer-reviewed studies—come with a lot of built-in corroboration. On the other hand, lawyers and law enforcement will tell you that eye-witness accounts can be unreliable, requiring several stories to approach the objective truth of an event. Video or audio recordings are generally treated as objective if their contents are unaltered, while humans and the stories they tell or write are subject to numerous external factors and stimuli. The trustworthiness of a primary source is often related to its expertise, motivations, perceptiveness, and accurate recording skill.

Secondary sources are intermediaries that relate the content of a primary source and might summarize, provide context, elaborate, or analyze the primary source in some way. News reports are a prominent form of secondary source. The trustworthiness of a secondary source is often established by examining the primary sources used and developing a pattern of reliable reporting on other primary sources. The Justice Team has made some recommendations at the bottom of this article.

While evaluating sources for reliability is good practice in choosing where to go for news and other information, sometimes you encounter information from a source you don't know. How can you evaluate whether a particular "fact" is indeed factual? This is where fact checking becomes important. Seeking corroboration from your trusted sources works in a lot of cases, but sometimes what you received is a bit more niche. Many times, its rarity is a clue to question its veracity. On the other hand, there are lots of truths that simply aren't significant enough to get broad coverage in other sources. The Justice Team suggests a few fact-checking sites below.

Don't become an unwitting pawn in someone else's scheme for profit, influence, or propaganda. Never share a "gotcha" meme on social media without verifying its

information. Don't relate something you heard or read without a caveat or some deeper investigation. In a culture rife with misinformation like ours is today, you can be a finger in the dike that stops the overwhelming flood of lies playing right into the hands of power- and money-hungry systems that extract from our lives and the Earth for their own selfish benefit.

Justice Team recommended information sources:

- [CLINIC](#)
- [Vatican News](#)
- [Catholic Charities USA](#)
- [Brennan Center](#)
- [BBC](#)
- [Associated Press](#)
- [Reuters](#)
- [AFP](#)
- [Democracy Now](#)
- [Heather Cox Richardson](#)
- [National Catholic Reporter](#)
- [FAIR](#)

Fact-checking sites to try:

- [Media Bias / Fact Check](#)
- [AllSides Media Bias](#)
- [Snopes](#)
- [FactCheck](#)
- [PolitiFact](#)
- [AP Fact Check](#)

