




Investigate

What IS a Reliable
Source Anyway?





Who wants to fall for “fake news?” Before you find out how not to get fooled, you have to know what you’re looking for in the first place.

What IS a reliable source anyway?





Reliable publications* all follow similar rules, which means they share certain characteristics.

Knowing these rules will help you figure out what sources you can rely on, and what sources can't be trusted.

PS: A publication is anything that provides information in a public space. *The New York Times* and CNN are examples of publications. So is your favorite YouTube channel or celebrity Instagram. Not all of these examples are equally reliable...



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Here are four characteristics of reliable publications, according to the Columbia Journalism Review. Click on each one to learn more.

A reliable source is

- [Independent](#)
- [Balanced and Accurate](#)
- [Accountable and Transparent](#)
- [Careful and Measured](#)





Independent means the publication is its own boss:

- No one has paid the publication to publish (or not publish) certain information.
- No one tells the publication what to share with the audience.
- Advertising and sponsored content are clearly labeled.



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Balance and accurate means the publication values getting it right:

- If something happens, the publication simply reports on it without commentary.
- They look at multiple sides of an issue and don't play favorites.
- They value professional editing, meaning very few typos, grammatical errors or spelling mistakes.



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Accountable and transparent means the publication isn't hiding anything:

- The publication corrects mistakes right away.
- Opinion articles and advertising are clearly labeled .
- It's easy to find out who wrote or created the information, who's in charge and who to contact with a correction or comment.



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Careful and measured means you can show this publication to your grandmother and not worry about it:

- The tone is respectful and calm. There isn't name-calling or aggressive language.
- The publication relies on experts, eyewitnesses and primary sources, not gossip.



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Ready for
the quiz!

A thick blue arrow graphic that starts with a 90-degree downward curve on the left and then points horizontally to the right.

Quiz time!

Show what you know about what makes a reliable source.



Go back to
review for the
quiz



Which source is more:

- Independent
- Balanced and Accurate
- Accountable and Transparent
- Careful and Measured

A.

From the Washington Post, September 27, 2016

In the first debate between presidential contenders Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, Trump repeatedly relied on troublesome and false facts that have been debunked throughout the campaign.

B.

From Hillary Clinton's campaign website, September 2016

During a 90-minute debate, in which he spoke for approximately 46 minutes, Trump managed to squeeze in 58 lies, distortions, and straight-up figments of his imagination into his answers—and we're not even counting the times he repeated his lies.



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The answer is A. But why?

The Washington Post is an **independent** publication. While they point out President Trump’s “false facts,” they chose not to call them “lies.” This word choice is **balanced** while also being **accurate**. The tone is **careful** and **measured**.

Answer B uses specific numbers, but this source is **not independent** or **balanced**. As Trump’s opponent, Hillary Clinton’s campaign website was all about making her look good. The phrase “straight-up figments of his imagination” is also **not careful** or **measured**.



You may love Kim
Kardashian's look (or not),
but her Instagram isn't a
reliable source for which
hair products work best.
Why not?



It's not:

- A. Independent
- B. Balanced and Accurate
- C. Careful and Measured
- D. Both A and B





Choices A and B come close, but neither alone is the correct answer.

Remember to read all the answer choices before selecting one!



Go back and try again





Choice C isn't quite right.

After all, this post is respectful and strikes the right tone, so it is **careful and measured**.



Go back and try
again



Next
question



D is right! Kim's instagram is

Not independent: Companies pay Kim Kardashian, so she'll use their products in her Instagram photos. She doesn't have full control.

Not balanced or accurate: Kim isn't testing different products and choosing the best one. She promotes the products that pay for her endorsement.

PS: We need to be **transparent** here. Many celebrities do this, not just Kim Kardashian.



Are self driving cars safe?



Look at the top three search results for your question. Based on the headline, which article do you read first?

- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. Does it matter?

1. **Can Self-Driving Cars Ever Really Be Safe? | DigitalNext - AdAge**
adage.com/article/digitalnext/driving-cars-safe/308673/ ▼
Apr 18, 2017 - Analysts estimate that by 2030, self-driving cars and trucks (autonomous vehicles) could account for as much as 60% of U.S. auto sales.
2. **How Safe Are Self-Driving Cars? | HuffPost**
www.huffingtonpost.com/.../how-safe-are-self-driving-cars_us_5908ba48e4b03b105... ▼
May 2, 2017 - Waymo Proves They're Pretty Darn Safe By Jeruld Weiland and Allison Crow On Tuesday, Waymo (formerly called Google's Self Driving Car ...
3. **Google's Self-Driving Cars Are Ridiculously Safe | Big Think**
bigthink.com/ideafeed/googles-self-driving-car-is-ridiculously-safe ▼
After 1.8 million miles, Google's self-driving car has been involved in only 13 accidents — all of which were caused by the other car.





Close, but not quite!

Choice #1: Can Self-Driving Cars Ever Be Safe? doesn't sound as balanced as it could. Using the word "ever" in the headline makes it sound like the writer might already have an opinion, rather than looking at all sides of the issue.



Go back and try
again





Try again, but picking this one is understandable.

After all, **Choice #3: Google's Self-Driving Cars Are Ridiculously Safe** is the most fun-sounding headline.

But it isn't **balanced** (what about other kind of self-driving cars?) or **measured** (ridiculously safe?). It also may not be **independent**. When articles mention brand names (Google, in this case), it might mean the company paid for or sponsored the article. That might not be true here, but it's something to keep in mind.



Go back and try
again





Yes, it matters.

The first thing you read about a topic often sticks in your brain and determines how you continue to think about it. This is actually has a name: **anchoring bias**.

To avoid anchoring bias, make sure your source is reliable before you start reading. (The next presentation is all about how to do that.)



Go back and try
again





You got it!

Click for next
section



Start with Choice #2: How Safe are Self-Driving Cars? It has a headline that is careful and measured. It matches your search question.

Reminder: You still have to read it! Choice #2 may not turn out to be the most reliable article, but it's the best place to start. (The next presentation is all about how to do that.)





Let's review!

- A reliable source is
 - Independent
 - Balanced and accurate
 - Accountable and transparent
 - Careful and measured





Reliable Source List

The sources on these lists are already vetted, which means they are reliable. But they are not the only ones! Don't worry if your source isn't on this list.

[List of best news websites for students from Common Sense Education](#)

[List of the best sites for teaching and learning from the American Library Association](#)





Want to know how to make sure the source you find is reliable, even if it's not on the Reliable Source List?

Check out [Is This Source Reliable?](#)

