BRINDI QUINN

How to Read Your Feed

A free guide to media literacy

Read the claim

Find the source

Check the evidence



16 lessons to explore

Start here ›

Start anywhere

I learned these checks while studying communications and media. They work on posts you already agree with, too. Pick a topic to try them.

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More to explore

A clip with no date? Try lesson 16. A headline about a new law? Try lesson 10. For a quick test of your own, jump to the group chat.

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What does “woke” mean here?

“Stay woke” has roots in Black English as a call to stay alert to racial injustice. Today one speaker might use “woke” to praise that awareness. Another might use it to dismiss a policy. When a headline uses the word, who said it, and what were they describing?

ONE WORD, DIFFERENT USES

Start with the speaker.

Then check **What did they describe?**

A REAL EXAMPLE

Who said it in court?

In 2022, Florida state attorney Andrew Warren challenged his suspension by Gov. Ron DeSantis. Asked what “woke” meant, Ryan Newman, the governor’s chief lawyer, described a belief that injustices are built into American society and should be addressed. That was a witness’s answer in the case.

TRY IT

Take the label out

Imagine a post says your library made a “woke” display. What books went on the shelf? Who chose them? Take the word out and write one sentence about what happened. If you can’t yet, you’ve found your next question.

Who actually reported this?

Start with the name under the headline. A news agency like the Associated Press sends its reporting to many outlets. If three sites all carry the same AP story, you still have one report. To add another perspective, look for reporting from the community where it happened.

THREE NEWS SITES

All three reprint one AP story

Distinct reports	1

EXAMPLE

Three links can tell one story

Imagine three sites report that a port strike ended. All three use the same story quoting the port authority. A local reporter talks to dockworkers who say workers at one terminal are still on strike. Now you have a better question. Which terminals reopened?

TRY IT / IMAGINED EXAMPLE

Will the port close?

ONE SUBTITLE

“We will close the port.”

ANOTHER TRANSLATION

“We may close the port.”

One word makes a possible closure sound certain. Find the full recording. If you don’t speak the language, ask a fluent speaker to check that sentence in context before sharing the quote.

TRY IT

Try reading from two places

Choose a story about an event abroad. Read a report from a newsroom near it and one from farther away. Trace a claim in each back to a person, document, or observation. Who saw it firsthand? What did one story help you see that the other missed?

Where did the argument jump?

Try this on a post you agree with. Write down what happened, then what the author says it proves. What connects those two statements? A logical fallacy is a mistake in that connection. Someone can reach the right conclusion using the wrong reason.

IMAGINE A BUS ROUTE

New bus shelters go up

More people ride **What changed?**

EXAMPLE

Did the shelters do it?

Imagine a post says, “More people rode the bus after we built shelters. The shelters did it.” What else happened that month? Maybe fares fell or buses ran more often. Compare similar routes with and without new shelters before you credit the shelters.

LOOK CLOSER

Did they answer the question?

Imagine a town council hasn't released a contract. Asked why, an official says, "The next town did it too." That may be true. It still leaves the question open. Try asking again in a way the official can answer.

> "When will the contract be public? If you're withholding it, which rule allows that?"

TRY IT

Quote the actual proposal

Imagine a six-month test of a bus lane. A critic replies, “They want to ban cars everywhere.” That’s a straw man. The reply attacks a made-up proposal that’s easier to argue against. Go back to the actual one. What would happen on that one route?

What makes it fascism?

Fascism is a far-right political tradition. It puts an extreme idea of national unity above individual rights and rejects democracy, with a leader claiming to speak for the entire nation. When you see the word in a headline, ask who gets to belong and what happens to people who disagree.

A REAL DOCUMENT

Reichstag Fire Decree

Germany **February 1933**

A REAL EXAMPLE

What changed after the fire?

After Germany's parliament building burned in 1933, Nazi leaders blamed Communists and secured an emergency decree. It let authorities restrict speech, the press, and public meetings. The government could shut down newspapers and jail political opponents without specific charges. The crisis gave the government legal tools to silence its critics.

LOOK CLOSER

Who was cast as the enemy?

Many dictatorships concentrate power. Fascist movements also tell a story about who truly belongs to the nation and who supposedly threatens it. Nazi propaganda cast Jewish neighbors as enemies, and laws stripped away their rights. Follow what people in power said, what they did, and who paid for it.

TRY IT

Test the comparison

If a post compares today's news with 1933, find the exact action it points to. Did an official criticize a newspaper? Did the government order it closed? Look up any order, who can enforce it, and what happened. Say where the comparison holds and where it falls apart.

What did the employer do?

DEI stands for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Those three letters can cover different practices, like where jobs are advertised or how interviews are scored. When a headline says someone was hired “because of DEI,” ask what changed in that workplace and what evidence links it to the hire.

IMAGINE A JOB POSTING

Same nursing license required

New step **Public listing**

EXAMPLE

Same test, more people invited

Imagine a hospital that used to advertise nursing jobs through employee referrals. This year it posts the jobs publicly. Every candidate still needs the same license, answers the same questions, and gets scored by the same rules. The change is who gets a chance to apply.

LOOK CLOSER

An audition behind a screen

Some U.S. orchestras put a screen between musicians and judges. Judges could hear the performance without seeing who played. Researchers found evidence that screens helped women advance in some rounds. Several estimates were too uncertain to tell how much difference the screen made.

TRY IT

What would settle the claim?

Suppose a post says that hospital lowered its standards. Compare the old and new job requirements and the rules used to score interviews. A wider pool of applicants and lower standards are two different claims. A photo of a new nurse tells you little about either.

What did the camera leave out?

Propaganda tries to win people over to a cause. One way it works is by showing only what helps its case. A camera can record something that actually happened and still give viewers the wrong idea. Who chose the scene, and what stayed out of view?

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

Soccer at Theresienstadt

Year filmed **1944**

A REAL EXAMPLE

The soccer match was real

In 1944, the Nazis ordered a film made at Theresienstadt, where they imprisoned Jewish people. It showed a soccer match and children performing an opera. The film hid the harsh conditions. After filming, the Nazis deported many people who appeared in it to Auschwitz.

LOOK CLOSER

You've seen this clip before

Meta says interactions help its apps decide which posts to show you. If the same clip keeps coming back, see whether the accounts are all reposting one upload. Ten copies can make a claim feel familiar. You may still have just one person's footage.

TRY IT

Cover the caption

Imagine a campaign post shows three dark storefronts. The caption says the mayor put them out of business. Cover the caption. You can see the lights are off. Were the shops closed for good? When was this filmed? What evidence connects a closure to the mayor?

One arrest. Millions of people?

A headline about an immigrant's arrest can be accurate and still leave the wrong impression about an entire group. If the story compares two groups, check how many people were in each, which offenses were counted, and whether the numbers track arrests or convictions.

TEXAS STUDY

Arrests for violent felonies

Years studied	**2012–2018**

A REAL EXAMPLE

Put the study back in the headline

Researchers counted arrests for violent felonies per 100,000 people in each group. In Texas from 2012 to 2018, the rate for U.S.-born citizens was more than double the rate for undocumented immigrants. Keep the place, years and word “arrests” when you pass it on.

LOOK CLOSER

Same topic, different budgets

The Congressional Budget Office studied a rise in immigration. For 2023, it estimated that state and local spending rose more than tax revenue. For 2024–2034, it projected that added federal revenue would exceed the extra costs it counted.

> Check what each report counts. The federal forecast left out spending Congress approves each year.

TRY IT

Ask what the dollar figure counts

Say a headline claims immigration cost a town $1 million. The story cites a year of school spending. Ask how much was added spending, what taxes or grants came in, and who paid the bills. Compare figures for the same place and time.

Warning signs can overlap

Gregory Stanton’s model describes ten processes that can occur during genocide, such as treating people as less than human, persecuting them, and denying the crimes. Several can happen at once. When an alert appears in your feed, look for the pattern it names and the evidence behind it.

TWO KINDS OF CLAIMS

A warning and a ruling

First check **Who said it?**

A REAL EXAMPLE

When radio helped target people

During the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the radio station RTLM sometimes broadcast the names and locations of people to be killed. Describing the broadcasts as hateful leaves a crucial detail out. The station was helping direct violence at specific people.

LOOK CLOSER

Read the whole alert

In January 2025, the Lemkin Institute issued a U.S. genocide-risk alert after a gesture by Elon Musk that the institute described as a Nazi salute. Watch the footage, then read the alert. What can you observe yourself? What does the institute infer from the gesture and its context?

TRY IT

A warning signals risk

If a report warns of genocide, keep “warns” when you share it. To establish genocide, courts look for an act listed in the treaty, such as killing, and an intent to destroy all or a substantial part of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group because of who they are.

Who gets to tell the story?

In 1952 the New York Daily News put Christine Jorgensen, a trans woman and Army veteran, on its front page. The headline focused on her military service and looks. In 1967 she wrote her own life story. What can her account tell you that a headline never could?

TWO ACCOUNTS

Who described her life?

1952 · headline

1967 · autobiography

EXAMPLE

One race gives you one result

Imagine a post uses a photo of a trans athlete winning a race to claim that trans athletes win all the time. The official results can tell you who won that race. To test the broader claim, you'd need reliable counts across comparable races, including how many athletes competed. A photo can't tell you who is trans.

LOOK CLOSER

Use the words people choose

Indigenous participants adopted the term Two-Spirit at a gathering in Manitoba, Canada, in 1990. For some, it describes aspects of gender, sexuality, spiritual life or a role in their community. If a story calls someone Two-Spirit or transgender, check how that person describes themselves.

TRY IT

Find the rule behind the story

When you see a headline about a sports ban, read the rule. Who wrote it? Which sports and levels does it cover? Is it proposed or in effect? Then look for reporting that includes athletes affected by the rule, so you can understand what it means in practice.

Watch for the word “they”

When a story says what “they” believe, look for who actually spoke. A religious leader can explain a teaching. A survey can tell you what the people who answered said. A neighbor can describe what happens at her kitchen table. Which question can each of them answer?

IMAGINED INTERVIEW

A story about fasting

People quoted **One family**

EXAMPLE

One family speaks for itself

Imagine an article quotes one family about why they fast on a particular day. Then the caption says everyone in their faith does the same. A more accurate caption tells you what this family does. A reporter could ask others how the practice varies between communities.

LOOK CLOSER

Speaking another language at home

Say a headline claims a quarter of a town can’t speak English, but the source counts people who speak another language at home. The U.S. Census Bureau asks about those separately. Someone can speak Somali at dinner and English at work. Check which question the table answers.

TRY IT

Give your first take a test

Pick a custom someone called strange. Write down what you assumed about it. Find two accounts by people who practice it, ideally from different places or generations. Then name one detail that complicated your first impression and one question you'd ask now.

Which part of government acted?

“The government decided” leaves out the part you need. In the U.S. federal system, Congress votes on bills, the president and federal agencies carry out laws, and courts decide cases about what the law allows. Before you share a headline, name who did what.

FROM THE SENATE RECORD

Sunshine Protection Act

Senate passed it **March 2022**

A REAL EXAMPLE

Did we stop changing the clocks?

In March 2022 the U.S. Senate passed a bill to make daylight saving time permanent, with some exceptions. It passed by unanimous consent, without a senator objecting. The House received the bill and took no further action. The Senate record supports “Senate passes bill.” Does it support “Clock changes end”?

LOOK CLOSER

Which vote did they lose?

To stay in office, the UK government needs enough support in the elected House of Commons to govern. That's called having the confidence of the House. A government can lose a vote on a bill and still have that support. When a headline says "Government defeated," check what the vote was about.

TRY IT

Check the verb in the headline

Find a federal bill on Congress.gov and open “All Actions.” Use the latest action and its date to write a headline. If only the House passed it, say so. If the bill became law, check when the part you’re writing about goes into effect. Those dates can differ.

What did they ask to change?

Feminism works toward equal rights and opportunities across genders. Imagine a headline calls feminist organizers “furious” and never says what they want. Look past the writer’s description. What are the organizers asking for? And who could make it happen?

A HISTORICAL MILESTONE

The 19th Amendment

Ratified **1920**

A REAL EXAMPLE

Who could actually vote?

In 1920, the 19th Amendment barred the U.S. and the states from denying citizens the vote because of sex. Some women already voted. Many Black women in the Jim Crow South still faced discriminatory registration rules. An anniversary story can tell you what changed and who still faced barriers.

LOOK CLOSER

Who disappears in the totals?

At a General Motors plant, the workers hired last were laid off first. Black women who lost their jobs said past hiring discrimination had put them at the back of the line. The court pointed to women GM had hired earlier. As legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw noted, those women were white.

> Intersectionality helps explain how race and gender can shape someone's experience at the same time.

TRY IT

Read past the announcement

Imagine a company announces paid leave for employees. Before sharing, open the rules and see if part-time workers qualify. Then look for a story that actually talks to a part-time worker. The policy can tell you who qualifies. A worker can tell you whether they can afford to use it.

Who’s behind this outlet?

A news site says it’s independent. Open a new tab and look up the outlet’s name. Who do other sources say owns it? Compare what you find with the outlet’s own About page. Then check who pays for the reporting and who decides what gets published.

CHECK TWO RECORDS

Who pays the bills?

Who picks the stories? **Ask separately**

A REAL EXAMPLE

Check the donor list and the rules

ProPublica lists some of its bigger donors on its Supporters page. Its gift policy says donors can’t approve stories before they run. Read both pages. The donor list shows where some money comes from. The policy describes the rules. You need separate evidence to show that someone broke them.

LOOK CLOSER

Two names, one owner?

Open The New York Times Company’s 2025 annual filing and search for “The Athletic.” You’ll find both newsrooms listed under the same company. If they report the same fact, follow the links and quotes in each story. Did the reporters use different evidence, or do both stories trace back to the same source?

TRY IT

Look for the missing voices

Imagine a hospital sponsors a local news site that reports on emergency room wait times. Look for the sponsorship disclosure, the original figures and interviews beyond the hospital. If the article only quotes the hospital’s press release, you’ve found a gap you can point to.

Who took the post down?

When someone says their free speech was violated, find out who acted. The First Amendment limits the government's power over speech. A private platform generally sets its own rules. If an official used government power to pressure the platform to remove the post, that can raise a First Amendment question.

READ THE RULING

NRA v. Vullo

U.S. Supreme Court **2024**

A REAL EXAMPLE

What did the court decide?

The National Rifle Association said a New York regulator pressured insurers to drop it over its advocacy. In 2024, the Supreme Court said that could violate the First Amendment if proven. In 2025, an appeals court ruled the regulator was protected from paying damages in this case. The Supreme Court declined further review in 2026.

LOOK CLOSER

When does speech count as incitement?

U.S. courts use a specific test for incitement. In Brandenburg v. Ohio, the Supreme Court said the government can punish calls to break the law as incitement when the speaker aims to cause it right away and the speech is likely to bring it about. Read the whole statement in context.

TRY IT

Look for the threat

Imagine a mayor calls a newspaper editorial unfair. Now imagine the mayor threatens an inspection unless the paper takes it down. Look for the official's exact words, the power they had and what they threatened to do. Those details help you tell criticism from pressure backed by government power.

What is this article here to do?

Check the label near the headline or author's name. A news report tells you what happened. Analysis uses reporting to explain what it could mean. An editorial argues for a position. One site can publish all three. Check the facts even when you already agree with the author.

IMAGINED COUNCIL VOTE

Report · Analysis · Opinion

Decisions covered **One**

EXAMPLE

One vote, three stories

Imagine a city votes to cut late-night buses. A news report gives the vote and the date service ends. An analysis uses shift schedules and route maps to show who could lose their ride home. An editorial asks the mayor to restore funding. All three start with the same vote.

LOOK CLOSER

This travel story is an ad

Imagine a travel site names the best hotel for a weekend away. Near the author's name, you spot "Paid advertisement by the regional tourism board." That label tells you who paid for the recommendation. Before booking, look for reporting or a review that the tourism board didn't pay for.

TRY IT / IMAGINED EXAMPLE

Check the actual vote

HEADLINE

“Every council member voted yes”

MEETING RECORD

6 in favor · 0 opposed · 1 abstained

Two sites run the same Reuters story. Both say every council member voted yes. Check the meeting record. One member abstained, meaning they didn’t vote yes or no. How would you describe the result to a neighbor?

What can this statistic tell you?

For 2022, the CDC had data from 41 reporting areas on weeks of pregnancy at the time of an abortion. Among reported abortions with a known number of weeks in those areas, 1.1% occurred at 21 weeks or later. That answers a question about timing. What would you need to find out why someone sought care then?

2022 CDC DATA · 41 REPORTING AREAS

1.1% at 21 weeks or later

Included	**Pregnancy length known**

EXAMPLE

Which pill does the story mean?

If a post calls Plan B an abortion pill, look up the medicine by name. The FDA says Plan B One-Step helps prevent pregnancy by delaying or stopping the release of an egg. It can’t end an existing pregnancy. Knowing the drug’s name gives you something specific to check.

LOOK CLOSER

Which law, in which state?

In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade and ended the federal constitutional right to abortion that Roe recognized. State law can still protect access. Minnesota's 2023 law recognizes a pregnant person's right to continue a pregnancy or get an abortion. Always check which state a headline is talking about.

TRY IT

Read the emergency exception

If a headline says a state allows abortion in an emergency, look up the law in effect on the date in the story. Does it cover threats to life, serious risks to health, or both? To learn what happened when someone sought care, look for accounts from patients and their medical teams.

Real video. Wrong night?

A clip says it shows “tonight’s flood.” The bridge, the water and the people could all be real. The video could still be from another town or another year. Start by checking the place and date in the caption.

IMAGINED VIDEO

The caption claims “tonight.”

Check first **Place and date**

EXAMPLE

Search with one frame

Pause on a street sign or building. Take a screenshot and search that image with a tool like Google Lens. Found the same footage in a report from two years ago? It couldn't show tonight's flood. No match? Try another frame or check local reporting.

LOOK CLOSER

What did the label verify?

Some images carry Content Credentials, a signed record that can list the camera or editing tools used. Even a verified edit history can’t tell you whether this photo shows tonight’s flood. Screenshots can lose that record. A missing label alone tells you little.

TRY IT / IMAGINED EXAMPLE

What did the study count?

AI SUMMARY

12,000 people

ORIGINAL STUDY

1,200 households

Imagine an AI tool summarizes a study. Open the paper and compare these two lines. The number changed, and so did what was counted. Before sharing a statistic, find both in the original. If you can’t find the paper, hold the claim. AI tools can invent references, too.

Would you pass this on?

A friend sends a clip with the text “They voted to close the school library early. Starts Monday!” In the clip, someone says, “We’d close at six.” The meeting agenda lists a proposal to change library hours. What can you confirm? Try writing a one-sentence reply before you turn the page.

IMAGINED GROUP CHAT

The text says it’s settled

The agenda lists **A proposal about hours**

ONE POSSIBLE REPLY

Here’s what I’d send

“I found the proposal about library hours. Has anyone seen the official meeting notes? I’d like to check whether it passed and when it would start.”

> Already passed it along? Reply in the same thread with the agenda and say what you can confirm. If you find the vote, add that too.

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

OPENING CASE / Loaded words in the news

Associated Press · The history of “woke”

FOX 13 Tampa Bay · Reporting from the Warren trial

PolitiFact · How speakers use “woke”

LESSON 01 / Global news

Associated Press · What is AP?

AERA Open · Civic Online Reasoning Across the Curriculum

Reuters · Automated translation guidance

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 02 / Logical fallacies

UNC Writing Center · Fallacies

Purdue OWL · Rhetorical Strategies

LESSON 03 / Fascism and state power

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum · Fascism

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum · Reichstag Fire Decree

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum · Defining the Enemy

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 04 / DEI and hiring

EEOC · DEI and employment discrimination

U.S. OPM · How structured interviews work

Goldin & Rouse · The blind audition study

LESSON 05 / Propaganda

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum · State of Deception

Holocaust Encyclopedia · The 1944 Theresienstadt film

Meta · How feeds rank content

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 06 / Immigration coverage

Light, He & Robey · Texas arrest study

National Academies · Immigration and budgets

CBO · State and local budgets in 2023

CBO · Federal budget projection

LESSON 07 / Genocide warnings

United Nations · Genocide Convention, Article II

World Court · Genocide ruling, para. 198

Genocide Watch · The Ten Stages

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum · Incitement to Genocide

Lemkin Institute · U.S. alert, January 2025

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 08 / Reporting on trans people

National WWII Museum · Christine Jorgensen's Story

OAH · Reporting on Jorgensen in 1952

Trans Journalists Association · Stylebook and Coverage Guide

Canada Post · Participants recall the Two-Spirit gathering

LESSON 09 / Worldview and bias

Harvard Religion and Public Life · Core Principles

Society of Professional Journalists · Code of Ethics

U.S. Census Bureau · How language use is measured

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 10 / Civics & accountability

USA.gov · How laws are made

U.S. House · Branches of government

Congressional Research Service · Daylight saving time

House of Commons Library · Commanding confidence

U.S. Senate · The March 15, 2022 floor record

LESSON 11 / Feminism & framing

National Archives · Nineteenth Amendment

National Park Service · Beyond 1920

Kimberlé Crenshaw · Race and sex in discrimination law

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 12 / Who owns the news

ProPublica · Supporters

ProPublica · Gift acceptance practices

SEC · New York Times Company 2025 Form 10-K

LESSON 13 / U.S. free speech

Constitution Annotated · State action and free speech

U.S. Supreme Court · NRA v. Vullo (2024)

U.S. Supreme Court · Brandenburg v. Ohio (1969)

Second Circuit · Decision on remand (2025)

Supreme Court docket · Review denied (2026)

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 14 / News, analysis & opinion

News Literacy Project · The Info Zones

Reuters · How newsrooms receive wire stories

FTC · Guide to native advertising

LESSON 15 / Reproductive health reporting

CDC · Abortion Surveillance, 2022 (table 10)

FDA · How Plan B One-Step works

U.S. Supreme Court · Dobbs decision (2022)

Minnesota Statutes · Reproductive health rights

KFF · Exceptions to state abortion bans

Follow the evidence

Tap a source to read it. Tap a lesson to go back.

LESSON 16 / Checking AI, images & video

AFP Fact Check · Finding the source of a video

C2PA · Content Credentials and their limits

NIST · Generative AI Profile, section 2.2

FINAL EXERCISE / The group-chat test

George Mason University · Debunking Handbook