How to recognise unreliable information

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HOW CAN WE TELL IF ONLINE INFORMATION IS RELIABLE?

Imagine you see this claim online: **"Drinking lemon water every morning can prevent illness."**

It sounds healthy and believable — but should we trust it?

Let's investigate the claim step by step.

STEP 1: DON'T BELIEVE OR SHARE IT IMMEDIATELY

The first step is simple:

STOP.

Don't immediately believe the claim, click "Share", or send it to someone else.

Instead, ask: **"How do I know this is true?"**

The World Health Organization recommends asking questions such as **Who said it? When was it published? How do they know?** when checking health information online.

STEP 2: SEARCH FOR THE CLAIM

Open a search engine and type: **"Can lemon water prevent illness?"**

Look at several search results.

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Don't automatically choose the first result.

Ask:

- Who published the information?
- Is the source trustworthy?
- Is there evidence?
- Are other reliable sources saying the same thing?

STEP 3: CHECK A RELIABLE SOURCE

Now open the NHS website and search for information about **water, hydration, and lemon**.

https://www.nhs.uk/search/results?q=water+hydration+lemon

The NHS explains that water is a healthy way to stay hydrated and mentions that adding a slice of lemon or lime can be a way to make water more enjoyable. However, this is very different from claiming that lemon water **prevents all illnesses**.

This is an important lesson:

A source can support part of a claim without supporting the whole claim.

STEP 4: CHECK THE AUTHOR AND ORGANISATION

Look at who produced the information.

Ask: **Who is behind this website?**

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For health information, a national health service, government health authority, or recognised health organisation can be a useful starting point.

The WHO specifically recommends checking who wrote health information, whether the author is an expert, whether sources are provided, and whether the information is up to date.

STEP 5: LOOK FOR EVIDENCE

Now ask: **"What evidence supports the claim?"**

A reliable health article should ideally provide evidence, references, or links to credible sources.

If a website simply says: **"Scientists have proved this!"** but doesn't identify the scientists or provide evidence, this is a warning sign.

STEP 6: COMPARE SOURCES

Search for the same claim on another reliable website. For example, you can compare what you find with information from the **World Health Organization** - https://www.who.int/

WHO advises people to find out whether the source is reliable, identify the source of the claims, and check current official and evidence-based information.

STEP 7: CHECK THE LANGUAGE

Look carefully at the original claim.

Does it use words such as:

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- “miracle”
- “guaranteed”
- “cures everything”
- “scientists don't want you to know”
- “share this with everyone”

These types of phrases should make you stop and investigate further.

WHO also recommends analysing claims carefully and being cautious when something sounds unbelievable.

OUR CONCLUSION

After checking the claim, we should **not conclude that lemon water prevents illness** simply because we found websites making that statement.

What we can establish from a reliable source is that drinking water helps with hydration, and adding lemon can be one way to make water more enjoyable.

Therefore: **The original claim is too broad and is not adequately supported.**

THE 5 QUESTIONS TO REMEMBER

Whenever you find information online, ask:

1. WHO?

Who created the information?

2. WHEN?

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When was it published or updated?

3. WHERE?

Where did the information come from?

4. EVIDENCE?

What evidence supports the claim?

5. COMPARE?

Do other reliable sources agree?

YOUR TURN

Try this claim: **"Drinking coffee before exercise always makes you perform better."**

Search for information about this claim. Then complete the checklist:

Question	Your answer
Who created the information?	
When was it published?	

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What evidence is provided?	
Is the source trustworthy?	
What do other reliable sources say?	
Would you share the information?	

Final Question: **What would make you trust this information more?**

Think about:

☐ A named expert
☐ Recent information
☐ Evidence and references
☐ Agreement with other reliable sources
☐ A trustworthy organisation

REMEMBER

STOP → CHECK → COMPARE → DECIDE

Stop before sharing.

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Check the source, author, date, and evidence.

Compare the information with other reliable sources.

Decide whether the information is trustworthy enough to believe or share.

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