

The SIFT Method (The Four Moves)

Introduction

The SIFT Method, developed by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield, is a strategy designed to evaluate the credibility and reliability of online content. It provides a structured approach to determine whether sources can be trusted, particularly in a digital environment where misinformation is common. The method is based on techniques used by professional fact-checkers and is particularly useful for analyzing news, social media, and other online media. Each step in SIFT helps you make informed decisions before sharing or using information.



Below is a guide to each step in the SIFT process.

Stop!

Before you read, share, or react to any online content, **stop** and ask yourself:

- Do I recognize this source?
- What do I know about its reputation or trustworthiness?

- Am I reacting emotionally to this information?

Headlines and posts are often designed to provoke strong emotional responses. Avoid reacting or sharing until you have paused to evaluate the content. If the source or claim is unfamiliar, use the remaining steps to investigate further.

Stopping also helps you avoid getting sidetracked or overwhelmed by irrelevant information. Whether your goal is a quick evaluation or in-depth research, taking a moment to assess your approach ensures you stay focused.

[Online Verification Skills: Video 1: Introductory Video](#)

Investigate the Source

Determine the credibility of the source by researching the author, organization, or website publishing the information. Ask:

- What is their expertise on the topic?
- Are they biased or aligned with a particular agenda?
- Do they have a track record of accuracy?

Use [lateral reading](#) to see what other trusted sources say about the organization or author. This means leaving the original webpage and searching for external perspectives, such as Wikipedia or independent reviews. On social media, use techniques like hovering over profiles to learn more about who is sharing the information.

Taking just a few moments to investigate can help you decide whether the source is trustworthy and worth your time.

Use [Hovering](#) to learn more about the people sharing information, especially on social media platforms such as TikTok.

[Online Verification Skills: Video 2: Investigate the Source](#)

Find Better Coverage

Sometimes, the specific source or article you encounter is not as important as the claim it makes. In these cases, look for additional, more reliable coverage from trusted outlets. This helps you:

- Verify the accuracy of the information.
- Determine whether it reflects a consensus or if it is controversial.
- Access more detailed or unbiased reporting.

Trusted coverage often comes from sources with a history of accurate reporting and minimal bias. You can use fact-checking resources, such as nonpartisan websites or media bias tools, to find reputable sources. Over time, build a list of trusted outlets to streamline your research process.

[Online Verification Skills: Video 4: Look for Trusted Work](#)

Trace Claims, Quotes, and Media to the Original Context.

When encountering claims, quotes, or media, trace them back to their original source to ensure they are accurately represented. Consider:

- Are the claims fairly and accurately presented?
- Is the information being taken out of context or cherry-picked?
- Has the content been distorted or sensationalized to attract attention?

Follow links in articles, check bibliographies, and search for original studies, quotes, or reports. Context is essential, as information can easily be misrepresented when stripped from its original setting.

For instance, a video, image, or claim may appear misleading if the surrounding details are omitted. Understanding the full context ensures you have a clear and accurate interpretation of the information.

[Online Verification Skills: Video 3: Find the Original Source](#)

Conclusion

The SIFT Method provides a practical framework for evaluating online content, helping you make informed decisions about its credibility and reliability. When in doubt, consult trusted resources or seek guidance from experts, such as librarians, to navigate complex or ambiguous information.

Additional Resources

[Check, Please! Starter Course](#)

Five 30-minute lessons that discuss the SIFT Method of fact- and source-checking.

[Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers](#) (2017)

Open textbook by Mike Caulfield that covers practical fact-checking strategies.

