Misinformation, Disinformation, Bad News & Fake News:
Techniques for getting closer to the truth on the Web

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For more information, see: http://guides.kirkwood.edu/evaluatingweb

Types of mis- and dis-information:
1. Satire: disinformation for the purpose of humor or social commentary (e.g. The Onion)
2. Propaganda: disinformation for the purpose of misleading and influencing people; serving an agenda, often political in nature
3. Commercial propaganda: disinformation for the purpose of selling a product
4. Misinformation: unknowingly repeating disinformation, thinking it’s true

We all have our own biases! We need to be aware of these before responding to information we encounter.
- Confirmation bias: the tendency to trust information we already agree with and dismiss information we don’t agree with or don’t like.
- Emotional impact: the tendency to ignore the need to verify information when we have a strong emotional response to it.

If you have a strong emotional response to information, that is your cue that you need to evaluate it carefully before accepting it or sharing it.
Four Quick Steps
To get closer to the truth

1. Has the article or claim already been fact-checked?
   a. Several reputable fact-checking sites already exist. Do a Google search for the title of the article, or for the key words and phrases of the topic. Include a site search with the name of a fact-checking site.
   b. See: http://guides.kirkwood.edu/evaluatingweb for a list of fact-checking sites.

Example:

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obama pledge of allegiance banned site:snopes.com
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2. Go upstream to the original source
   a. Follow up on sources if given in the article. E.g. “According to…”
   b. Search key words and phrases from the article to find others on the same topic
   c. Use Google “Tools” date limit to find earliest dated article on the topic.
   d. Have any known, reputable news sources picked up the story?

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3. Read more about the source
   a. Search the name of the website and/or the author using Google. What have others said about them? What other types of articles do they publish? See Snopes list of fake news sites.
   b. What is the purpose of the site? Informational, persuasive, sensational?

4. Circle back
   a. If you still are unsure of the truth of the information, circle back to step 1, using what you’ve learned to get closer. Also, know when to give up on a source and find better information somewhere else.

Based on Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers by Michael Caulfield https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com