

# Navigating Online Information

## Tips & Tricks for Parliamentary Research





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## INTRODUCTION

By focusing on three steps of the research process, namely **finding**, **evaluating**, and **using** online information, this resource contains guidelines and practical tips that parliamentarians can apply when conducting **online research**.

Parliamentarians require timely and focused information to carry out their representational, lawmaking, and oversight roles. The spread of online information and communication technologies (ICTs) and mobile internet devices has transformed how parliamentarians perform these roles by increasing the accessibility and diversity of sources that generate information on matters of relevance to legislative agendas. Nonetheless, paired with busy daily schedules, this context can increase the challenges associated with information overload for parliamentarians. Determining the objectivity of information found online has also been complicated by increased distribution of disinformation and algorithms known as “filter bubbles” that can skew what information is displayed by online search engines.

This resource has been developed to assist parliamentarians and legislative staff in navigating these challenges to fully maximize use of the internet for information gathering and management that complements library and research support services provided by parliaments. Beyond the tips provided, this publication also compiles other resources that may be of interest to parliamentarians conducting online research. It profiles various databases, including those that disaggregate national and regional statistics on the basis of gender and other demographic variables, such as ethnicity, geographic location, education, age, and socio-economic wellbeing. These considerations are important for ensuring that legislative decisions achieve intended and equal results for individuals of all genders and for traditionally under-represented population groups.

## SECTION 1 - FINDING INFORMATION

The first step in conducting online research is to identify the type of information you are looking for (e.g. facts, statistics, current and past legislation, etc.). Doing so can help you better identify online sources applicable to your work and objectives. The following section provides guidance on how to quickly and efficiently find various types of information online using popular **search engines, databases, and social media platforms**.

### Search engines: Tips & tricks



**Note:** These tips and tricks are focused on Google, as it is undoubtedly the most popular search engine. However, there are others that may be of interest based on personal preference, such as Yahoo! or Bing, with similar features.

### Use the Right Terminology

People sometimes search for things using the same terminology or phrasing they would use when speaking. You can get more precise results by using language likely to be found on websites, which is often more technical or formal. For example, “how much hotter has it become in Bolivia in the last 10 years” could be replaced by “mean temperature change in Bolivia since 2013.”

For more specific results, you can gradually refine the search to bring you fewer, more targeted results. Start with something simple and then make the search term more complex if you are not seeing the results you are looking for. For example, if you are looking for information on gender mainstreaming strategies, your search process may look something like this:

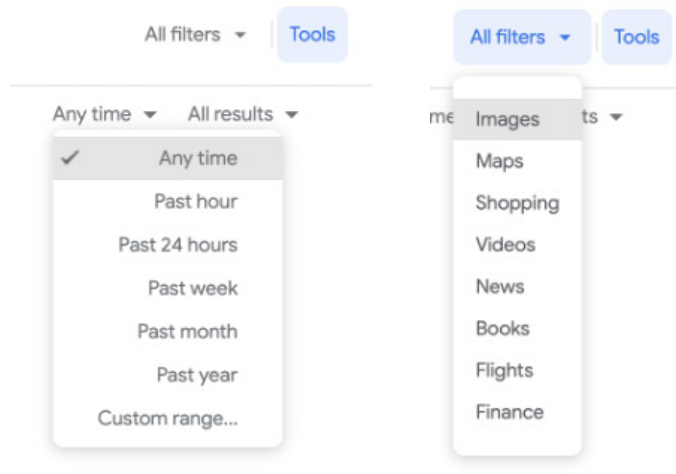
“Gender” → “Gender mainstreaming” → “Gender mainstreaming strategies”

### Filter Content

Google has built-in **tabs and filters** that can help you narrow your search results. For example, you can select “news” and “past 24 hours” if you are interested in the most recent news articles on a topic. You can also filter by country (pages published in a certain region), language, and date (results from a specific period of time) by using Google’s [Advanced Search](#) function.



## Advanced Search



**Search operators** are also special commands and characters that help filter content. Below is a list of common search operators that may be of interest.

Operator	Description	Example
" "	Used to search for an exact phrase. Results will contain exactly what is in the quotation marks.	"Bill 01 2015"
*	The asterisk is used as a placeholder within a search term phrase. Essentially, it allows the search operator to "fill in the blank." Often used to search for variations on a root word.	"read*" (could return results that contain the word reader, reading, ready)
OR	Used to search one word/phrase or another	"Legislative openness" OR "open parliament"
AND	Used to search two words/phrases (not one or the other but both)	"ILO" AND "informal sector"
Site:	Limits the search to a specific web page	"femicide" site: <a href="http://unwomen.org">unwomen.org</a>

Operator	Description	Example
Filetype:	Limits the results to specific types of files, e.g., PDFs or PowerPoint Presentations (PPT)	"legislative transparency" filetype:pdf "climate change" AND "policies" filetype:ppt
##..## (Range of numbers)	Limits search results to a determined range, which can include years	"elections * Uruguay * 1980..2014"

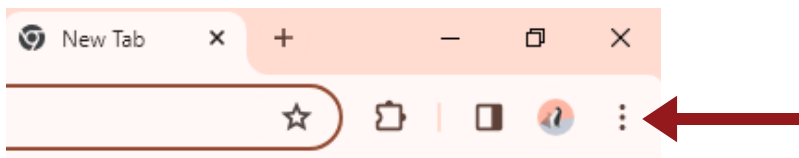
## Be Mindful of Search Algorithms and Avoid Filter Bubbles

Popular search engines like Google use algorithms to selectively guess what information a user wants to receive based on their past searches. This can result in “filter bubbles” that effectively isolate the user from websites that might present contrasting viewpoints. To ensure that you are receiving the most comprehensive results and to avoid missing information, there are two primary ways to circumvent filter bubbles:

### Delete Cache and Disable Tracking Cookies

Within your browser’s settings, often under privacy and security settings, there should be a button that allows you to “clear browsing data.”

Example: To find the settings on your Google browser click the 3 dots in the right hand corner



Within the privacy and security settings, you can choose to clear your browsing history, cookies and other site data, and cached images and files. This can be done for a specific period of time or your history can be deleted in its entirety. For more information on how to access these settings for your specific browser (Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, etc.), please see [Norton's Reference Guide](#).



### What are Cache and Cookies?

Cookies are files created by the sites you visit. They make your online experience easier by saving browsing data.

The cache remembers parts of pages, like images, to help them open faster during your next visit. Regularly clearing these files can help your device run more optimally and can fix certain problems, such as loading or formatting issues on web pages. It can also help you avoid the filter bubbles created by search algorithms.

Source: [support.google.com](https://support.google.com)

## Go Anonymous

There are alternative Internet search engines, such as [DuckDuckGo](#), that emphasize protecting your privacy and avoiding the filter bubble of personalized search results. These anonymous search engines distinguish themselves from others by not profiling users and by deliberately showing all users the same search results.

## Take Advantage of Language Accessibility

Using Google's [Advanced Search](#) option allows you to narrow your search results by only showing content in the language that you are interested in (45+ languages available). Some websites also give you the option to change to a specified language, a function which is often found at the top or bottom of the page. Similarly, installing the [Google Translate Chrome Extension](#) adds a translate button to your browser toolbar, which can be clicked whenever you want to translate the current web page. Note that language preferences can most often be saved in the "Settings" of your browser or device.



## DATABASES

There are many publicly-available databases online, which are organized collections of information and often have built-in features for simple (or more advanced) data analysis. For nearly every topic of interest, databases can be commonly found across government web pages, academic and policy-oriented research institutes, public libraries, and international organizations.

Google also has its own subsidiary search engine called [Dataset Search](#), which allows users to discover datasets across the web using a simple keyword search. This can be a helpful tool if you are looking for data on something very specific. However, if you are searching for data on a more general topic, it may take additional time to identify the most reliable sources.

The following list has been compiled by ParlAmericas for ease of reference. It covers topics relevant to the legislative agenda falling under thematic pillars of our work: gender equality, climate change and sustainable development, and open parliament.



## Gender Equality

### [Gender Equality Tools for Parliamentarians in the Caribbean](#)

This portal is a joint initiative of ParlAmericas and the UN Women Multi-Country Office - Caribbean. It is designed for self-guided online learning and additionally includes resources that can be used for in-person trainings.

### [Caribbean Women Count](#)

Caribbean Women Count: The Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub is a central repository of knowledge on the prevalence of the different forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual violence from five countries (Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) and barriers to accessing services in CARICOM.

### [Gender Data Portal - OECD](#)

The [OECD](#) Gender Data Portal includes selected indicators covering education, employment, entrepreneurship, health, development, governance, digital and energy for OECD member countries, as well as partner economies.

### [Gender Data Portal - World Bank](#)

The [World Bank's](#) Gender Data Portal makes the latest gender statistics accessible through compelling narratives and data visualizations to improve the understanding of gender data and facilitate analyses that inform policy choices. It includes both a [Gender Statistics Data Bank](#) and [Resource Repository](#).

### [Gender Development Index \(GDI\)](#)

The GDI, as part of the [United Nations Development Programme's](#) Human Development reports, provides country comparisons and measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health, education, and command over economic resources.

### [Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

[ECLAC's](#) Gender Equality Observatory focuses on three dimensions of women's autonomy: [economic autonomy](#), [physical autonomy](#), and [autonomy in decision-making](#). The Observatory provides up-to-date data, in addition to relevant legislation from across the region and other resources to support policy making on gender equality issues.

## Gender Equality

### [Gender Inequality Index \(GII\)](#)

The [GII](#) is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. A low [GII](#) value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice-versa.

### [Gender Quotas Database](#)

As a joint initiative of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance ([IDEA](#)), Inter-Parliamentary Union ([IPU](#)), and Stockholm University, the [Gender Quotas Database](#) provides a global overview of gender quotas in parliaments (see [IDEA's data page](#) for additional tools and resources).

### [Global Gender Gap Index](#)

The [World Economic Forum's](#) [Global Gender Gap Index](#) annually benchmarks the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

### [Women, Business and the Law \(WBL\)](#)

The [WBL](#) databank is another [World Bank](#) project, which collects data on the laws and regulations that affect women's economic opportunity around the world.

### [Women's Power Index](#)

Created by the [Council on Foreign Relations \(CFR\)](#)'s Women and Foreign Policy program, the [Women's Power Index](#) ranks 193 UN member states on their progress toward gender parity in political participation. It analyzes the proportion of women who serve as heads of state or government, in cabinets, in national legislatures, as candidates for national legislatures, and in local government bodies, and visualizes the gender gap in political representation.

## Climate Change and Sustainable Development

### [Environment and Sustainability: Mapping Strategies and Plans of the Americas and the Caribbean](#)

This ParlAmericas resource maps the strategies and plans adopted by the Governments of the Americas and the Caribbean to address specific environmental and climate change topics. It compiles and systematizes the information in one location to prove accessibility, as well as further familiarize parliamentarians with the action plans and initiatives being undertaken by their Executive Branches and identify progress and potential gaps.

### [Climate Action Tracker](#)

The Climate Action Tracker is an independent scientific project that tracks government climate action and measures it against the globally agreed Paris Agreement aim of "holding warming well below 2°C, and pursuing efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C," while also determining likely temperature increases during the 21st century using the [MAGICC climate model](#).

### [Climate Change Laws of the World](#)

Initiated by the [London School of Economics' Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment](#), the Climate Change Laws of the World database covers national-level climate change legislation and policies around the world.

### [Climate Policy Radar](#)

An open data resource, this knowledge base provides useful and accessible big data on climate law and policy and insights to inform climate action.

### [CO<sub>2</sub> and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data Explorer](#)

Maintained by [Our World in Data](#), the data explorer is a collection of key metrics, including data on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (annual, per capita, cumulative and consumption-based), other greenhouse gases, energy mix, and other relevant metrics.

### [Gender Climate Tracker](#)

The Gender Climate Tracker provides key statistics, policies, and research related to gender and climate, as well as tracks implementation of gender-climate action under the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#).

## Climate Change and Sustainable Development

### [Global Climate Action Portal](#)

Launched by UN Climate Change, Peru, and France, the interactive map allows actors from around the globe - countries, regions, cities, companies, investors, and other organizations - to register their commitments to act on climate change. The portal also tracks [upcoming events](#), such as the UN Climate Change Conference and other regional or global summits.

### [IMF Climate Change Dashboard](#)

In collaboration with other international organizations, the [IMF](#) has identified and developed a range of distinctive indicators that demonstrate the impact economic activity is having on climate change. These indicators have been grouped into five categories: [Economic Activity](#), [Cross-Border](#), [Financial and Risks](#), [Government Policy](#), and [Climate Change Data](#).

### [Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America](#)

An initiative to foster increased knowledge, dissemination, and implementation of rights of access to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters, as enshrined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

### [Parliamentary Observatory on Climate Change and Just Transition](#)

The Parliamentary Observatory on Climate Change and Just Transition (OPCC) is a cooperation network carried out jointly by parliamentary leaders from various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the main purpose of building up a regional agenda on climate ambition and just transition. This platform developed by the OPCC constitutes a shared information tool on the state of parliamentary procedures related to environmental bills and proposals as well as environmental legislation in the region.

## Climate Change and Sustainable Development

### [World Bank - Climate Change Knowledge Portal](#)

The [World Bank](#)'s Climate Change Knowledge Portal provides global data on historical and future climate, vulnerabilities, and impacts. It includes country and watershed views, as well as synthesized country profiles.

## Open Parliament

### [Open Parliament Commitment Tool](#)

Parliaments across the Americas and the Caribbean are undertaking efforts to open their institutions through action plans and commitments on transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity. This tool allows users to visualize, compare and track parliaments' progress on the achievement of their open parliament commitments using a traffic light model.

### [Open Parliament Tools for Parliamentarians in the Americas and the Caribbean](#)

As part of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network (OPN), this web portal provides toolkits and other training materials for parliamentarians to deepen and expand their knowledge on how to open legislative processes, as well as promote open government principles through their law-making, oversight, and budget allocation functions.

### [Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency](#)

Provides information on good practices for legislative openness, as well as access to a periodically updated index about the existence and effectiveness of transparency and openness policies and mechanisms in Latin American legislatures.

### [Open Government - OECD-OPSI](#)

Provides access to Open Government toolkits and case studies of strategies around the world related to transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation for democratic governance.

### [Open Government Data Toolkit](#)

A project of the World Bank, the Open Government Data Toolkit is a collection of online tools and knowledge that provide guidance on Open Data strategies and platforms.

### [The Open Government Partnership Learning Portal](#)

Provides research perspectives, up-to-date data, and other resources related to open government strategies.

## Additional Resources

### [ParlAmericas Resources](#)

This section of our website provides up-to-date access to resources created to assist parliamentarians and the general public to strengthen democracy and good practices in the hemisphere, such as our [Primer on Gender-Responsive Parliamentary Work on Food Security](#), [Global Parliaments and the Paris Agreement](#), and [Road Map Towards Legislative Openness 2.0](#).

### [CEPALSTAT Data Bank - ECLAC](#)

This data bank serves as the gateway to all the statistical information of Latin America and the Caribbean countries collected, systematized, and published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

### [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association \(CPA\) Knowledge Centre and Library](#)

This portal consists of toolkits, guidelines, and various publications that are designed to support the work of parliamentarians, parliamentary officials, and other stakeholders in the field.

### [European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

The European Institute for Gender Equality is an independent centre and primary source for information on gender equality in the European Union, which includes a Gender Equality Index and Gender Statistics Database.

### [Parliamentarians for Global Action Resources](#)

The resource section of the [Parliamentarians for Global Action](#) (PGA) website provides access to publications, documents, reports, and handbooks authored or co-authored by PGA.

### [Parline](#)

The [Inter-Parliamentary Union's](#) Parline provides global data provided directly by national parliaments on their structure, composition, working methods, and activities.

### [WORLD Policy Analysis Center](#)

The WORLD Policy Analysis Center provides an overview of rights, laws, and policies in all 193 UN member states in the areas of education, health, adult labour and working conditions, child labour, poverty, constitutional rights, discrimination, childhood, gender, marriage, families, aging, and disability.

## Additional Resources

### Academic institutions

Academic institutions are often home to a wide range of research institutes that may provide relevant regional and/or international data online; for example, the University of Costa Rica houses the Central American Population Center ([El Centro Centroamericano de Población](#)).

### International agreements

International agreements, which often have periodic reviews or reporting obligations, can be referenced to show what countries have already committed to doing on particular issues and provide context on what further progress needs to be made. For example, the UN Human Rights Office provides a [ratification history](#) of 18 international human rights treaties and ECLAC provides [country-specific reports](#) on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### UN and Inter-American agencies

The website of regional and multi-country United Nations and Inter-American agencies, such as the [Inter-American Development Bank](#) and [UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean](#), can be valuable sources of information, along with relevant national offices (e.g. [UN Women - Mexico](#)).

## SOCIAL MEDIA

There is a vast amount of content spread across social media platforms, including *posts, comments, reactions, shares, videos, images, and hashtags*. The quick spread of information has meant that social media has become an increasingly important news source for people of all ages, as well as a tool to mobilize public opinion.

In many ways, social media data can be useful for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, as it can reflect the opinions and behaviours of constituencies in real-time. The following section provides brief guidance on some of the most important features and tools that can help you find and analyze social media data. While platforms are often developed and updated rapidly, many of these features are applicable across different social networking services.





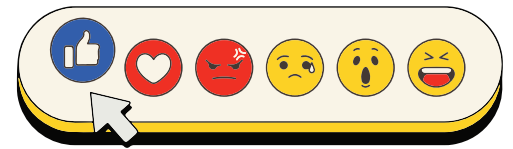


**Note:** Given its accessibility, it is natural to gravitate towards social media as an online information source. However, social media data can also be incomplete, biased, or manipulated, and it is important to remain aware of its shortcomings to ensure the information you are gathering is both reliable and credible. More guidance on how to do so can be found in [Section 2](#) of this publication.

## Types of Data

Social media **posts** can take the form of written material, photos, videos, and infographics, among others. Some social media platforms focus on one type of content (such as TikTok's focus on videos), whereas others may be more multi-purpose for its users. These posts may be the first time that information is published or they may relay information from other existing sources. Other users may also engage with these posts in a variety of ways, including post **reactions**, **comments**, and **shares**. These interactions can also be considered useful data because it reflects attention (both positive and negative) to the content being shared.

The most common **reaction** on social media is *liking* a post. The reactions available will vary based on the platform, but can also include emojis that display emotions, such as love, anger, and sadness. **Comments** provide qualitative information on other user's impressions of a post. Comments can also be part of **shares**, which is when a user wants to spread the reach of a post and share it within their own networks. The number of reactions, comments, and shares will often be displayed on the post, including a full or partial list of the associated users.



**Hashtags** are characters following the # symbol that categorize and track content across a social media platform. They are searchable, clickable links that you can use to follow topics that you are interested in, see how individual posts fit within larger community narratives, and better understand how many people are talking about the same thing. For example, a user may be interested in seeing what people are saying about the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference on Facebook. By searching the official hashtag **#COP28**, all public posts that have included this hashtag will be shown.

While often overlooked, checking the **Following** and **Followed** by tabs on a user's social media profile can also be a beneficial way to find information. It provides data on who is connected digitally and what information is being shared to whom.

## Information from Verified Accounts



These days, many public figures and organizations use social media to maintain a digital presence. Following accounts of interest can be a useful tool to learn more about what specific information they are communicating and sharing online.



It is important to note that many social media platforms have a verification process, whereby brands, organizations, politicians, journalists, and other public figures can prove their identity. The purpose of this is to prevent fraud and protect the integrity of the individual or organization associated with the account. Some tips on identifying authentic accounts from fake accounts can be found in [Section 2](#) of this publication.

## Social Media Analytics

As a social media user, you can also collect valuable data about your own account using social media analytics. Some common things that can be measured include:

- 🔍 *Clicks* - how many times people have clicked on your post to view the details
- 🔍 *Likes* - how many users have liked your post
- 🔍 *Shares* - how many times people have redistributed your post to others
- 🔍 *Comments* - how many replies your post has received

There are many paid social media analytics software packages available, such as [Hootsuite](#) and [Sprout Social](#), but there are also free features available through specific social media platforms (depending on the type of account you are using). For example, if you have a Facebook [Page](#), you can use [Facebook Page Insights](#) to view metrics about your page's performance and better understand your audience engagement.



### Tip:

If you are interested in learning more about how to use social media effectively for parliamentary objectives, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has a [Social Media Guide for Parliaments and Parliamentarians](#) released in 2021 (available in English, French, and Spanish).

## SECTION 2 - EVALUATING INFORMATION

### “Fake News”

Finding information is only one step of the research process. Unlike printed materials, which often go through an extensive review and editorial process, information on the internet can be published by anyone. As a result, it is important to evaluate the data you are collecting to ensure that it is accurate and coming from a reputable source. Evaluating online information has become increasingly important in recent years, as “fake news” has gained notoriety and the spread of mis- and disinformation has rapidly increased. While terms are often used interchangeably, there are distinctions to be made between the types of “fake news” found online.



## Misinformation vs. Disinformation

“**Fake News**” is an umbrella term that encompasses many different types of false information, but it can be categorized into two groups: misinformation and disinformation.

**Misinformation** is information that is false but that is shared because someone believes the information to be true and accurate; it is not created with the intention of causing harm.

**Disinformation**, on the other hand, is information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country.<sup>1</sup>

### 7 Types of Misinformation and Disinformation<sup>2</sup>

SATIRE OR PARODY	No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool
MISLEADING CONTENT	Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual
IMPOSTER CONTENT	When genuine sources are impersonated
FABRICATED CONTENT	New content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm
FALSE CONNECTION	When headlines, visuals, or captions don't support the content
FALSE CONTEXT	When genuine content is shared with false contextual information
MANIPULATED CONTENT	When genuine information or imagery is manipulated to deceive



Despite the widespread benefits of artificial intelligence (AI), new technologies also have the capacity to create and spread false information in new ways. AI tools can create photorealistic images, mimic voice audio, and write text. AI has become a new area of legislative focus (including through the creation of [ParlAmericas Digital Caucus](#) launched in 2023), but with the currently sparse regulations, generative AI has made the creation of false content accessible to anyone with even basic digital skills.<sup>3</sup>

## Fact-checking and Credibility of Information

In the digital world, especially across social media platforms where discussion and knowledge-sharing is encouraged, misinformation and disinformation can appear in many forms. It is impossible to verify everything that you read online all the time. However, before you decide to share, like, comment, or otherwise use information found online, it is always wise to make sure the information is true and that it is coming from a reputable source. Just like everyday life (outside of the internet), when people build their actions around inaccurate information, this can negatively impact their decision making and other people's perception of their trustworthiness.

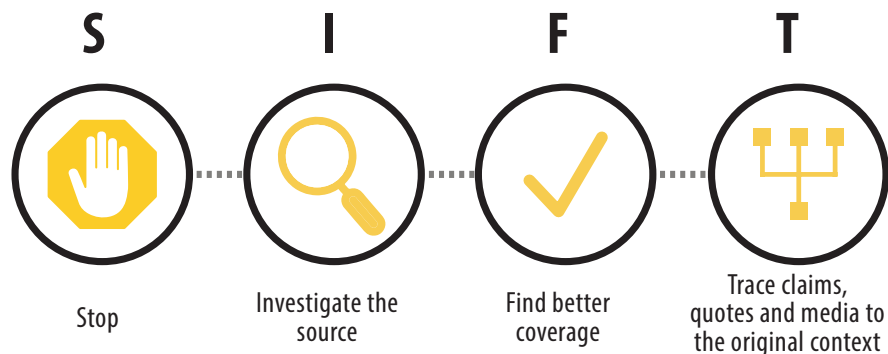
<sup>1</sup> [Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training by UNESCO, 2018](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Fake News. It's Complicated. by First Draft, 2017](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Guardian, 2023](#)

## The SIFT Evaluation Method<sup>4</sup>

There are many methods created for the purpose of fact-checking and assessing the credibility of online sources, but many can be time-consuming. The SIFT method is one that recognizes how valuable your time is and allows you to find credible information both quickly and efficiently. It consists of four “moves” during the research process:



### 1. Stop

Take a moment to reflect on the material by asking yourself the following questions:

- ➖ Do you recognize the author / publisher? If so, do you recognize it as a well-known source?
- ➖ What is the purpose of your research?
  - Some research tasks will require you to be more thorough in your evaluation. For example, if you are looking for up-to-date statistics for a report or intervention (e.g. data on women in the workforce), you will most likely spend more time fact-checking than if you were looking for information on a specific concept to strengthen your own day-to-day understanding of the topic (e.g. intersectionality).

### 2. Investigate the source

Know what you are reading before you read it

- 🔍 Understanding the expertise and agenda of the source is crucial to your interpretation of the material. This will also help you decide if it is worth your time or if you are better off finding more suitable coverage of the material.

### 3. Find better coverage by broadening your search

Understand the context and history of a claim by investigating how (and if) the claim is being validated across other reputable sources

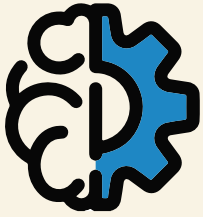
- ✅ Unless you are interested in what a specific source (e.g. Trinidad and Tobago Guardian) is saying, you can focus on the actual claim that is being made within the piece you are reading - i.e. assessing whether something is true or false, if it represents a consensus viewpoint, or if it is the subject of disagreement. Scanning for additional coverage can show you what the expert consensus is on a claim or piece of information, learn the history around it, and ultimately land on a better source if needed.

<sup>4</sup> The SIFT method was created by [Mike Caulfield \(2019\)](#); materials were adapted with a CC BY 4.0 license for this publication.

## 4. Trace claims, quotes, and media to the original context

When possible, find and read the original source of information

- ✦ By tracing content back to its original source, you can see whether the version you first came across was accurately presented.



The techniques associated with the SIFT method can help show you when a claim or information found online is blatantly wrong or misconstrued. However, even when the information is credible, employing these skills does something equally important: it reestablishes the context that is often lost in digital spaces, which allows for more productive and critical engagement with online information.

### Detecting Bots

Something that is unique to social media is the presence of **social media bots**. These bots are accounts run through automated programs that mimic human users on social networks. Hundreds of bots can be operated by a single person and, while there are “good” bots that exist, the vast majority of bots on social media are used for malicious purposes. They may be created to artificially amplify the popularity of a person or movement, influence elections, manipulate financial markets, amplify phishing attacks, spread spam, and shut down free speech.<sup>5</sup> By remaining aware of their existence, you can ensure that you are not taking the information they spread as fact.

#### How to Spot a Social Media Bot from a Real User:

- ✓ Run a reverse image search on their profile picture to see if they are using a photo of someone else taken from the web (more information on how to conduct a reverse image search is available in the next section)
- ✓ Look at the timing of their posts to see if they match up with their noted time zone or if they are making posts every few minutes consistently (this is an indication that the account is automated)
- ✓ Check their connections and followers, which can give valuable insight into the account’s legitimacy if their social network doesn’t seem relevant
- ✓ Use a bot detection service such as [Bot Sentinel](#)

### Other Tips

#### Reading the URL

Checking the domain suffix of a given webpage (the end of the URL) can also be a helpful indication of whether or not a source is credible. The table below outlines domains you are likely to come across when conducting online research.

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<sup>5</sup> [Cloudflare - Social media bot.](#)

## Common Domain Suffixes<sup>6</sup>

- .com	The most widely used and recognized domain; a catch-all. Short for “commercial,” but available to everyone. You will find a wide variety of websites using this domain.
Country specific	You will often come across domain suffixes that end in a country-specific code. For example, a Canadian organization may use a domain ending in -.ca rather than -.com.  Understanding these codes will help you quickly identify the location source of the webpage. A full list can be found <a href="#">here</a> .
- .org	Noncommercial sites. This domain includes nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, philanthropies, charities, religious organizations, educational and cultural institutions, arts organizations, and sports clubs.
- .edu, -.ac, -.college	Educational sites. These domains include mostly colleges and universities, which can be useful web pages when searching for academic research.
- .gov	Government sites, including local, state, and federal levels of government. These are useful websites if you are seeking country-specific data.
- .gov.[countrycode]	Domains ending in <b>-gov</b> by itself are part of the United States Government. However, other countries will often use a combination of <b>-.gov</b> (or a similar language equivalent, such as “gob” in Spanish) in combination with their country-specific code. For example, the Government of Mexico uses <b>-gob.mx</b> .
- .gv.[countrycode]	
- .gob.[countrycode]	

## Evaluating Images

[Reverse Google Image Search](#) will help you find the original source of photographs, memes, and profile pictures. By dragging an image into the Google Image search bar, you will see other websites where that image is featured, which can help determine its source or veracity (e.g. in the case of fake news). For instance, sometimes photos taken years beforehand are misattributed to a breaking news story. Reverse Google Image Search provides a list of the previous web pages where the image has been posted (and likely, the publication date). Limited search results would indicate that the image has not been posted elsewhere online.

## Keep Biases in Mind

Using a variety of sources can help to ensure that you are getting multiple perspectives of the content you consume. Always ask yourself if you are favouring one source over another because it is more reliable or because it is confirming what you already believe to be true.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from *Evaluating Internet Information*, University System of Georgia (n.d.) [https://www.usg.edu/galileo/skills/unit07/internet07\\_08.phtml](https://www.usg.edu/galileo/skills/unit07/internet07_08.phtml)

<sup>7</sup> <https://libguides.uvic.ca/fakenews/tips-for-avoiding>

## Question Content that Provokes Strong Emotion

Fake news headlines are often constructed specifically to encourage a strong reaction. Be wary if a headline promotes something that seems too good to be true or evokes outrage regarding a particular topic or event. Remember, provoking intense emotion is one way in which propagators of fake news incite its spread.<sup>8</sup>

## Be Cautious of Breaking News

News needs time to develop and reach those who report it. Events conveyed as they are happening are more likely to be misreported, leading to the spread of untrue or unconfirmed details.<sup>9</sup>



### Tip:

Make fact-checking a habit offline! Unfortunately, mis- and disinformation can spread outside of digital channels. By remaining aware of this, you can apply these same tools to any situation where information is being provided to you and you are unsure of its credibility.

## Further reading

For more information on how mis- and dis-information can spread online, how to spot it, and legislative advancements against it, see:

 [A Guide to Anti-Misinformation Actions Around the World](#), Poynter

 [The Global Disinformation Index](#)

 [Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online](#), Data Society

 [Understanding Information Disorder](#) and various [Training Resources](#), First Draft News

 [Fake News Guide](#), University of Victoria

## SECTION 3 - USING INFORMATION

The final step in conducting online research is to return to your original purpose and use the information you find. This includes finding ways to manage the information so that it remains accessible, up-to-date, and you are able to draw on the data at any point in time.

### Information Management

Beyond the use of browser bookmarks, [Save to Pocket](#) allows users to save articles and other content from the web for later – making it available on any device, even offline. [Instructions](#) are available for getting started

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<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> ibid

with Pocket, including how to add tags for organizing your saved content.

By using [Google Alerts service](#), you can also receive emails when new results appear (web pages, newspaper articles, blogs, or scientific research) that match your selected search term(s).

Similarly, [IFTTT](#) is a web-based service that creates chains of simple conditional statements, or “applets,” that can help automate tasks across your different applications and devices. For example, “if a new tweet from this geolocation is published, save it in a spreadsheet.” Other examples include: muting your phone during meetings, keeping your Facebook and Twitter profile pictures in sync, backing-up photos you’ve been tagged in, getting a wake-up call with the day’s weather forecast, creating reminders for starred emails, or getting an email whenever the head of state of your country signs a bill into law.

These automated tools can help you save valuable time in the research process, so that more time can be focused on incorporating the information into your legislative work.

### **Incorporating Qualitative and Quantitative Information to Support an Argument**

Data can be an effective **language** for convincing others of your perspectives and encouraging more discussion on an issue. It is concrete evidence that there is an issue and helps to demonstrate the actual scope of the issue. Having access to data that is disaggregated by sex, geographic location, age, and other variables is especially key as this allows for more nuanced discussion.



You can highlight messages and points raised by other advocates found in your research to demonstrate that there is broader commitment to the issue. Similarly, explicitly referencing publications, research papers, and speeches by advocates in your national context and at the regional or international levels helps emphasize the importance of your cause.

A further option is to share regional good practices, highlighting how other countries have responded to an issue and what the impacts were. Being able to point to good practices in other countries shows that others are taking action on the topic and provides a useful reference point for your own work - both in developing a response and the strategy for moving it forward.

### **Digital Citizenry and Leadership**



Being a digital citizen means having the knowledge of, and the ability to use digital technologies to locate information, evaluate information, synthesize, create, and communicate information. It also requires an understanding of the human and technological complexities of a digital media landscape. In parliamentary work, the ability to continuously learn and grow alongside new technological developments is a necessary step towards more adaptive leadership.





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