

Identifying Disinformation



At the library, Tom learned that sometimes the information he finds online may contain mistakes; sometimes information gets posted before important details are known, causing the author to unintentionally misinform the viewer by only representing a part of a larger story.

Other times, information is created intentionally to mislead. Tom can see the difference now! Misinformation happens by mistake, but disinformation is made by design. Disinformation is dangerous because it is intentionally created with the intent of tricking people.



Last week, Tom got a link from an old friend with information saying that the NASA moon landing in 1969 never happened. He clicked the link, and it opened a webpage claiming that the Apollo 11 mission, which was the first time that man landed on the moon, was fake.

Tom was confused. He remembered the day his dad took him to a restaurant to sit in front of a black and white TV.

Like Tom, many people didn't have TVs in the 60s, so people gathered around in public places to watch exciting events. Tom was just a little boy when the Apollo 11 mission happened, but he remembers very clearly the feeling of admiration as the two astronauts walking on the moon was broadcasted on live TV.

Tom wondered why this website would claim that the videos of the mission were a setup and why his friend would share that as if it was a fact. Tom has always been critical when it comes to information and he knows he has to do something, but he doesn't know what to do.

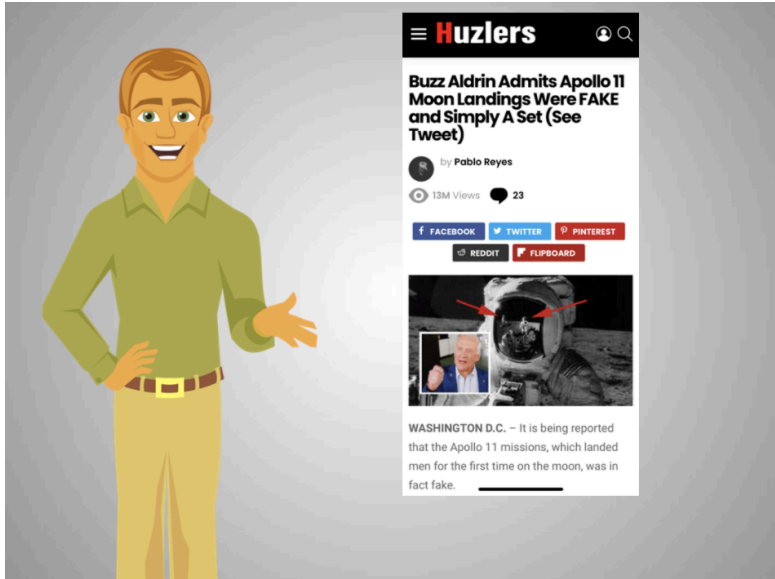
1 Ignore what he remembers, and trust the message because it was shared by his friend.

Be open to new information, but research to find out where this information is coming from. **2**

Click one option to continue

What should Tom do?

- Feedback for 1 - Tom should only share what he knows to be true. He should always find information on the topic before making up his mind about what he sees online.
- Feedback for 2 - Tom should be open to new information, but do his own research before making up his mind about what he sees online.



Tom clicked on the link to visit the site, and he looked at it with critical eyes.

On the surface, the information seemed compelling: well-written, with professional pictures, and hundreds of likes; but still, the idea that the event was only a performance just didn't add up in Tom's mind.

1 **Read** the entire page including the comments before deciding if he should trust the information.

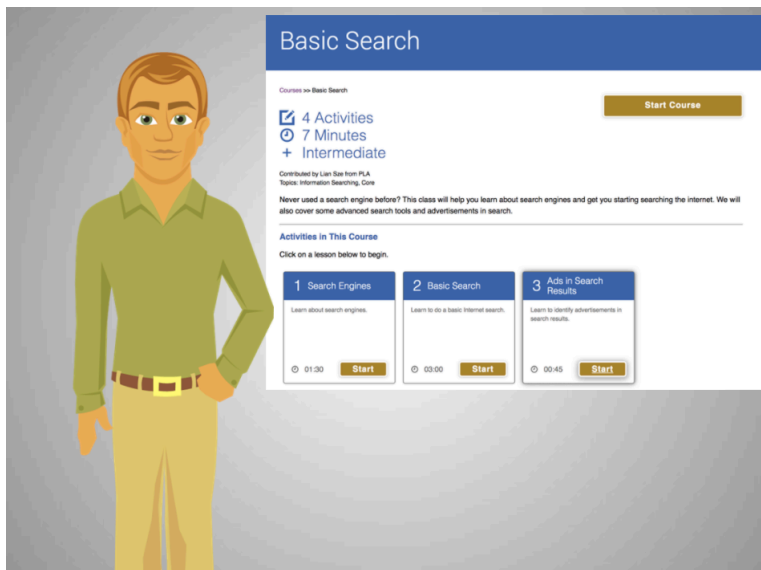
2 **Click** the links in the page to see if he can find out more information before deciding if he should trust it.

3 **Search** the topic using an Internet browser and any *search engine* before deciding to trust it.

Click one option to continue

What should Tom do now?

- Feedback for 1 - This is not the best option. All the information there is meant to support the point the author is making. For that reason, even if Tom reads the entire page and the comments, he may not be able to find out if what the page claims is true or false.
- Feedback for 2 - This is not the best option. Most likely, the links on this page will go to other places that support the point the author is making. For that reason, even if Tom follows the links, he may not be able to find out if what the page claims is true or false.
- Feedback for 3 - This is the best option. Searching online for the same topic can bring other sources containing similar information, if it is true; or it will bring sources disagreeing with claims. If Tom searches the topic online, he can compare what others say.



If you are unfamiliar with searching online or need to practice your online searching skills, you can review the Basic Search course in Chicago Digital Learn.

Tom knows how to search online. He performs a search and finds many sites with information about the same topic. After looking at the search results, he sees several websites confirming what he remembered to be true. There are sites that explain the facts to prove that people went to the moon. Those are called fact-checking sites.

Tom should always do a separate search online so he can compare information from other sources.



Tom remembers that the staff at the library said that anyone can write and publish anything online. Reading more carefully, he was able to see that this page was created by someone to purposely mislead people.

Misleading information has existed way before online information was possible. Tom knew that being cautious about what to believe, whether online or otherwise, is very important.

Because posting online is really easy, anyone can write information online. Learning how information gets to his social media pages will help Tom know what to believe and what not to believe.