

Lesson 12

You Can't Believe Everything You Hear

A source is any place we get information about something. Books, newspapers, movies, the person next to you on the bus, and the label on your mattress can all be sources of information.

When looking at sources, you will quickly realize that while some sources can be trusted, others cannot.

MAN ON INTERNET DISCUSSION BOARD: Did you know that the Queen of England doesn't need a driver's license to drive? She drives around all the time in her Range Rover without one.

This is quite an interesting thought. Why would the Queen of England not need a driver's license when everybody else does? But before we get carried away and start believing this, we need to ask a question.

us: How do you know that?

We shouldn't accept the claim of somebody on a discussion board just because he is saying something interesting or because we could imagine how it might be true – *anything* can be on a discussion board. We need to find out *how* he knows what he is saying is true. How do we know this man on the discussion board actually knows anything about the Queen of England?

MAN ON DISCUSSION BOARD: Uh, somebody told me about it. I think he read it on a Web site.

So, this man heard it from somebody else, who read it on an unknown

Web site. Should we trust him? Should we tell our friends that the Queen of England drives around without a license? Probably not. When sources tell us things, we need to be able to analyze them so that we can judge whether they are reliable.

There are rules for analyzing sources.



A Rule for Analyzing Sources:

If you don't know how a source obtained his information - how he knows what he knows - then the source should be considered unreliable.

When someone tells us something (like claiming that the queen doesn't need a driver's license), we should keep asking "Where did you hear that?" until we find out where that person obtained his information. If he cannot or will not tell us where he obtained his information, then all we have is that person's claim, and we should consider the information unreliable.

So, does the Queen of England need a driver's license to drive? We need to do a little research.

WWW.STRANGETHINGSABOUTFAMOUSPEOPLETHATYOUPROBABLYDONTKNOW-ABOUT.COM: One strange fact about Queen Elizabeth is that she doesn't need a driver's license to drive. In fact, she drives around all the time in her Range Rover. It even says so on the Royal Web site: "The queen doesn't need a driver's license to drive." Also, our reporter in England, Reginald Williams, said: "I've seen her drive in her Range Rover on several occasions."



This Web site seems as if it may be a slightly more credible source. However, we have not verified *this* Web site's source of information. We need to make sure the Web site's source says what it claims. It says the information came from the Royal Web site. We should check up on this as well.

WWW.ROYALBUCKINGHAMPALACEWEBSITE.UK: The Queen of England does not need a driver's license to drive.

www.royalbuchinghampalacewebsite.uk is probably a reliable source saying that the queen could drive a vehicle without a license *if she wants to*. It would know, and would probably have no reason to invent the idea. But the Royal Web site does not say that she actually *does* drive. When we check on sources we shouldn't assume things.

We could contact Reginald Williams from www.strangethingsaboutfamouspeoplethatyouprobablydontknowabout.com to find out if he actually did see the Queen driving around in a Range Rover.

But if we *really* wanted to know for sure, we could always go ourselves.

Late one night, you sneak into the Buckingham palace garage. You find a Range Rover parked there. It has a license plate that says "Warning: Queen in driver's seat." You hide in a garbage can. Early the next morning a lady walks in holding a handbag and wearing a crown. She gets in the driver's seat and drives away.

Exercises

- A. 1. What is the first rule for analyzing sources?
- B. In the following quotes, would you believe what the speaker is saying?
2. SALESMAN: For \$87.98 this “Comfor-Zone” pillow will help you get a good night’s sleep. You can take it from me, it works!
 3. BUCKINGHAM PALACE GUARD: Ma’am, I would suggest that you do not enter this area, as it is a restricted zone and I will have to shoot you if you do.
 4. MAN IN CROWDED PARKING LOT: Ma’am, are you having trouble finding a parking spot? You can leave the car with me and I’ll park it for you. I’ll bring it back to you when you need it, I promise.
 5. GESTAPO AGENT: Your friend André has told us everyting, so you see it is pointless for you not to cooperate. All vee need from you is to confirm some minor facts zat vee know already. Tell us ze names of ze people in your resistance group.
 6. *Encyclopedia Britannica*: The Tasmanian devil is a mammal of the marsupial family Dasyuridae, with a stocky body and large squarish head. The Tasmanian devil is 20 to 31 inches long. It has large jaws and strong teeth, and is named for its devilish expression, husky snarl, and often-bad temper.
 7. If you wanted to know what the American Declaration of Independence said, which source would be more reliable?
 - a. An American history book.
 - b. The Declaration of Independence.
- C. Decide whether the following e-mails should be forwarded. If you wanted to check up on these sources to find out if they were true, where would you go?
8. BILL GATES GIVES AWAY FORTUNE: Did you know that Bill Gates is giving away his massive fortune to anybody who wants to forward this

e-mail to their subscriber list? Yes, that's right, Bill Gates pledges to give you one hundred dollars for each person you forward this e-mail to. Why is he doing this? He says he is deeply grateful to all the people who have made him successful, and wants to give a little of his success back to his customers. All you have to do is send him the address you forwarded this to (so he can check if they are legitimate) and he will send you a check in the mail. Imagine, if you have only twenty people on your e-mail list you can make \$2,000! But you don't have to take our word for it. The Microsoft Web site has confirmed this e-mail, saying it is legitimate, go there to check it out. So, forward this e-mail. . .hey, it couldn't hurt!

9. **BOYCOTT KFC:** During a recent study of KFC done at the University of New Hampshire, they found some very upsetting facts. First of all, has anybody noticed that just recently the company has changed its name? Kentucky Fried Chicken has become KFC. Does anybody know why? The reason is because they cannot use the word chicken anymore. Why? KFC does not use real chickens. They actually use genetically manipulated organisms. These so-called "chickens" are kept alive by tubes inserted into their bodies to pump blood and nutrients throughout their structure. They have no beaks, no feathers, and no feet. Their bone structure is dramatically shrunk to get more meat out of them. This is great for KFC because there is no more plucking of the feathers or the removal of the beaks and feet. The government has told them to change all of their menus so they do not say "chicken" anywhere. If you look closely you will notice this. Please forward this message to as many people as you can. Together we can make KFC start using real chicken again.
10. Find out on the Internet, or anywhere you choose, if the Queen of England drives without a driver's license. (By the way, the Web sites listed in this lesson do not exist.)