

# Lateral Reading with AI

## Verify information from AI-generated outputs

**Grade Level:** Suitable for 6-12

**Suggested Time:** 1 Hour

### Overview

Lateral reading is when you look outside of your source to find additional information about a source's credibility, reputation, funding sources, and biases. This lesson builds students' critical thinking skills around AI-generated content by teaching them to verify sources using lateral reading. Students will practice identifying real versus fake articles produced by an LLM, then apply those same verification skills to sources they're using in a project they are currently working on. The lesson emphasizes making source verification a natural habit rather than a burden.

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## AI Learning Priorities

**Humans and AI:** Students examine why AI outputs require human judgment to verify rather than blind trust to accept.

**Representation and Reasoning:** Students discover how AI models generate citations that look real by representing patterns in data rather than retrieving verified facts.

**Machine Learning:** Students explore how the statistical nature of machine learning can produce confident, convincing outputs that are factually incorrect.

**Ethical AI:** Students evaluate the ethical responsibilities of using AI-generated content, including accuracy, attribution, transparency, and fairness.

**Societal Impacts of AI:** Students investigate how unchecked AI outputs - including hallucinated sources, sponsored links, and deepfakes - affect the reliability of information in society.

## Knowledge and Skills Topics

- Understanding what lateral reading is and how it differs from reading deeply within a single source
- Identifying AI hallucinations - fabricated or unreliable citations generated by LLMs
- Evaluating source credibility and bias
- Recognizing sponsored content and ad-optimized links in AI outputs
- Checking attribution and usage rights for creative content

## Materials and Resources Needed

- ☐ Student devices with a web browser and internet access. This works best on a laptop rather than a phone or tablet.
- ☐ Whitelist this link
  - ☐ [5 articles: fake vs real](#)
- ☐ Students' own project materials for Activity #2

## Curriculum Standards

- **ISTE 1.1.c Empowered Learner:** Students use technology to seek feedback that informs and improves their practice and to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.
- **ISTE 1.3.a Knowledge Constructor:** Students use effective research strategies to find resources that support their learning needs, personal interests and creative pursuits.
- **ISTE 1.3.b Knowledge Constructor:** Students evaluate the accuracy, validity, bias, origin, and relevance of digital content.
- **CSTA 2-IC-20:** Compare tradeoffs associated with computing technologies that affect people's everyday activities and career options.
- **CSTA 3A-IC-24:** Evaluate the ways computing impacts personal, ethical, social, economic, and cultural practices.
- **CSTA 3A-IC-25:** Test and refine computational artifacts to reduce bias and equity deficits.
- **AI4K12 Big Idea 5 Societal Impact:** AI can impact society in both positive and negative ways.

## Differentiation Suggestions

- For students needing additional support:
  - a. Pair struggling readers with stronger peers during Activity #1
  - b. Pre-select which two articles to evaluate in Activity #1 to reduce decision fatigue.
  - c. Allow the students to verbally explain their reasoning rather than writing it.
  - d. Provide a structured checklist version of the Activity #2 verification questions
- For English language learners:
  - a. Use the visual lateral reading infographic as an anchor throughout the lesson

- b. Pre-teach key vocabulary: credibility, bias, consensus, attribution, hallucination
  - c. Allow responses to Activity #2 questions in native language if needed
- For advanced students:
  - a. Challenge them to find a real-world example of AI-generated misinformation and trace it to its origin
  - b. Have them evaluate a source using multiple lateral reading strategies and write a brief credibility report

## Evidence of Understanding

- Students can correctly identify which articles are real vs. fake in Activity #1.
- Students can articulate why a source is or isn't credible, going beyond a simple yes/no.
- Students successfully answer the verification questions in Activity #2 with specifics about their own project sources.
- Students can identify what perspective or information might be missing from a source.
- Students can name an alternative source they could use if their current one disappeared.
- Exit ticket: ask each student to name one source from their project, state whether it passed verification checks, and explain what they would do if it failed.

## Key Concepts

- **Lateral reading** - evaluating a source by looking outside it at what other sources say about it, rather than reading deeply within it
- **AI hallucination** - when an LLM generates citations, statistics, or facts that appear real but are completely fabricated
- **Source credibility** - determined by author reputation, publication date, and corroboration from independent sources
- **Sponsored/ad-optimized content** - links or information in AI outputs designed to generate ad revenue rather than provide reliable results
- **Attribution and usage rights** - the ethical and legal responsibility to credit original creators, especially for creative content

## Activity Overviews

### Activity #1: Real vs Fake Using Lateral Reading

**Purpose:** Review a collection of articles to determine which are real and which are fake using lateral reading.

**Task:** Students will have 10 minutes to review which of [these 5 articles are real and which are fake](#). [Answers for teachers](#). Using lateral reading strategies students will determine which of these articles is a genuine, reliable resource. Open a new tab and use these Lateral Reading strategies:

1. Research Author & Publisher
  - Search the author name and publisher.
  - ASK: What do other sources say about this source?
2. Use Wikipedia
  - Use it as a starting point to learn about a publisher or author — not as your final source.
3. Check for Consensus
  - Are other credible sources saying the same thing?
  - If only one source makes a claim, that's a red flag.
4. Find the Original Source
  - If an article references a study or statistic, find the original document.
  - Does it say what this article claims?

### Activity #2: Receipts or It Didn't Happen

**Purpose:** Check sources of any information in an existing project, especially those created by or found with AI.

**Task:** Students will have 20 minutes to verify all sources using lateral reading and answer the following questions about sources in an existing project:

- Do these sources exist?
- Are they reputable sources?
- When was this created? Is it still current for your purpose?
- What's NOT included in this source? What perspective might be missing?
- If this source disappeared tomorrow, could you recreate your work with alternatives?

For creative elements also check:

- Is proper attribution given to original creators?
- Are cultural elements being used appropriately?
- What's the license/usage rights?

## Sequence, Session Flow, and Facilitation Prompts

### Sequence

1. Opening & Hook
2. What is Lateral Reading?
3. Activity #1 – Real vs. Fake using Lateral Reading
4. Debrief – Activity #1
5. Activity #2 – Receipts or It Didn't Happen
6. Debrief & Share-out
7. Wrap-Up

### Session Flow

#### 1-Hour Class Period

|                          |             |                                    |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| Opening & Hook           | 0:00 - 0:03 | Slides 1-2; Low stakes, engagement |
| What is Lateral Reading? | 0:03 - 0:10 | Slides 3-5; Direct instruction     |
| Activity #1              | 0:10 - 0:22 | Slides 6-7                         |
| Debrief - Activity #1    | 0:22 - 0:30 | Slide 8                            |
| Activity #2              | 0:30 - 0:52 | Slides 9-10                        |
| Debrief & Share-out      | 0:52 - 0:57 | Slide 11                           |
| Wrap-Up                  | 0:57 - 1:00 | Slide 12                           |

## 45-Minute Class Period

|                          |             |                                    |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| Opening & Hook           | 0:00 - 0:03 | Slides 1-2; Low stakes, engagement |
| What is Lateral Reading? | 0:03 - 0:10 | Slides 3-5; Direct instruction     |
| Activity #1              | 0:10 - 0:22 | Slides 6-7 then SKIP TO SLIDE 9    |
| Activity #2              | 0:22 - 0:43 | Slides 9-10 then SKIP TO SLIDE 12  |
| Wrap-Up                  | 0:43 - 0:45 | Slide 12                           |

## Facilitation Prompts

### [SLIDE DECK](#)

SLIDE 1 - Title slide

SLIDE 2 - Think About It

Say "Today we're going to talk about something that affects every single one of you - probably every day.

Raise your hand if you've ever used an AI tool like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or any other AI assistant to help you find information or write something.

(Pause for hands.)

Okay, most of you / Some of you / A few of you. Now keep your hand up if you checked whether the sources that AI gave you were actually real.

(Pause.)

Interesting. Let me tell you something that might surprise you.

AI tools are incredibly good at sounding confident. They write in complete sentences, they use formal language, they cite sources with author names, journal titles, and publication dates - and they can be completely, 100% made up.

This isn't a glitch. It's actually a known behavior of AI systems. It even has a name: hallucination.

### SLIDE 3 - Hallucinations

Say "When an AI hallucinates, it doesn't know it's doing it. It's not trying to trick you. It's simply predicting what a convincing answer looks like - and sometimes that means inventing sources that sound real but don't exist.

So today, we're going to learn how to catch that. We're going to learn a skill that professional journalists and fact-checkers use every single day called lateral reading.

By the end of this lesson, you'll have a practical toolkit for verifying whether the information you're reading - from AI or anywhere else - is actually trustworthy.

### SLIDE 4- What is Lateral Reading?

Say "Before we jump into the activity, I want to make sure we all understand what lateral reading actually is, because it's probably different from how you've been taught to evaluate sources before.

You've likely been told to evaluate a source by reading it carefully. Look at the author. Check the date. Read the whole article. This is called vertical reading - you go deep into a single source.

Lateral reading is different. Instead of reading deeply within a source, you open a new browser tab and look outside the source to see what other people say about it.

Think of it this way. Imagine someone walks up to you on the street and says 'Trust me, I'm an expert.' You wouldn't just take their word for it, right? You'd ask around. You'd look them up. You'd see what other people say about them.

That's exactly what lateral reading is. You're not just reading the article - you're investigating the source of the article.

Let me walk you through the four main strategies.

### SLIDE 5 - Lateral Reading Strategies

Say "Strategy number one: Research the author and the publisher. Open a new tab and search the name of the author and the name of the website or publication. Don't ask 'what does this source say about itself?' Ask 'what do other sources say about this source?' Big difference.

Strategy number two: Use Wikipedia. I know - you've probably been told not to cite Wikipedia. But here's the thing: Wikipedia is actually a great starting point for learning about a publisher, an organization, or an author. You're not using it as your final source. You're using it as a quick way to get context.

Strategy number three: Check for consensus. Are other credible sources saying the same thing? If one source is making a claim that nobody else is making, that's a red flag. If multiple independent, credible sources agree, that builds confidence.

Strategy number four: Find the original source. A lot of articles report on other articles, which report on other articles. If a source is referencing a study, a report, or a statistic, try to find the original document. Does it actually say what this article claims it says?

#### SLIDE 6 - Activity #1 - Real vs Fake

Say "We're going to do Activity #1 now. It's called [Real vs. Fake using Lateral Reading](#)."

Here's the setup. An AI was given a prompt asking for articles on a topic. The AI returned a list of sources. Some of those sources are real. Some are completely fabricated - they look real, but they don't exist.

Your job, working in groups of two or three, is to figure out which ones are real and which ones are fake.

#### SLIDE 7 - Activity #1 - Real vs Fake

Say "You have ten minutes. Use the lateral reading strategies we just talked about. Don't just click the link and read the article - go sideways. Open new tabs. Search the publisher. Look for the author. Check whether other sources confirm this exists."

I'm going to pull up the list of five articles on the board / share the link with you now.

[Share or display the linked Google Doc with the five articles.] Get

into your groups, open your devices, and start investigating.

#### SLIDE 8 - Debrief - Activity #1

Say "Okay, let's come back together."

Alright. Let's go through these. I want to hear your verdicts and - more importantly - your reasoning.

Let's start with Article One. What did your group find? Real or fake - and what's your evidence?

[Take responses for each article. After each one, affirm the process, not just the answer.]

Good. Notice what that group did - they didn't just read the article. They searched the publisher name and found that other sources had no record of it existing. That's lateral reading in action.

Did anyone come to a different conclusion on that one? What did you find?

[Allow for discussion.]

Here's what I want you to notice: the fake ones weren't obviously fake. They used real-sounding journal names, real-sounding authors, real-sounding titles. That's what makes this so dangerous - especially when AI is the one generating them. The AI has no reason to flag its own mistakes.

The question isn't 'does this look real?' The question is 'can I verify that this is real?' Those are very different questions.

Real journalists don't trust something just because it looks credible. They verify it. And now you have the tools to do the same.

#### SLIDE 9 - Activity #2 - Receipts or Didn't Happen

Say "Now we're going to shift into Activity Two. The idea is simple: if you can't prove it, you can't use it.

In this activity, you're going to apply the same verification skills to sources you're actually using - not just practice articles someone else found.

I'm going to give you a set of questions to guide your investigation. Work through them carefully. This isn't a race - it's a quality check.

#### SLIDE 10 - Activity #2 - Questions to Ask

Say "Here are the questions I want you to work through for each source you're evaluating.

First: Does this source actually exist? Go check. Don't assume. Find it.

Second: Is it a reputable source? Use your lateral reading skills. What do other sources say about this publisher or author?

Third: When was this created? Is it recent enough to be relevant and accurate for your purpose? A source from ten years ago might be outdated depending on your topic.

Fourth: What is not included in this source? Every source has a perspective. What viewpoint might be missing? Who might disagree with what this source is saying, and why?

Fifth: If this source disappeared tomorrow - the website went down, the article got deleted - could you find alternative sources to support the same point? If your entire argument depends on one source that no one else can verify, that's a problem.

#### SLIDE 11 - Debrief - Activity #2

Say "Let's come back together. I want to hear from a few groups - not about every source, but about the most interesting thing you discovered during that process."

Did anyone find a source that turned out to be less reliable than you originally thought? What tipped you off?

Did anyone find a source that turned out to be stronger than you expected once you investigated it?

Did anyone find a source that simply couldn't be verified at all?

This is the reality of working with information today - especially AI-generated information. The output can look polished and professional while pointing you toward something that doesn't exist, is out of date, or only tells part of the story.

The skill you practiced today isn't about distrust. It's about being rigorous. Good researchers, good journalists, good scientists - they all verify. They don't just accept. And that's exactly what you did today.

#### SLIDE 12 - Wrap-Up

Say "Before we finish, I want to leave you with one idea.

Verification is not about assuming everything is a lie. It's about earning confidence in the information you use.

When you verify a source and it checks out - when multiple independent, credible sources agree, when the author is who they say they are, when the publication has a real track record - that's actually a really good feeling. You're not just hoping something is true. You know it's true because you checked.

The flip side is also true. When you find something that doesn't hold up - a source that doesn't exist, an author with no record, a claim that no one else can corroborate - you've just protected yourself and anyone who's going to read or hear what you produce.

That matters. The information you put out into the world - in your writing, in your work, in your conversations - has an impact. Verifying your sources is how you take responsibility for that impact.

The tools we used today - lateral reading and fact-checking sites - these aren't complicated. They don't take a long time. But they make an enormous difference.

Make this a habit. Every time you use a source, ask: can I prove this is real? Can I prove it's credible? Can I prove it's current?

If the answer is yes, use it with confidence. If the answer is no - keep looking.

## Additional Resources

- [University of Chicago's Evaluating Resources and Misinformation. The SIFT method](#) (Stop, Investigate the source, Find better coverage, Trace claims) - a useful companion framework for teachers
- [News Literacy Project](#) - free educator resources on misinformation and source verification
- [Anthropic's documentation on how Claude and other LLMs work](#) - useful for grounding classroom discussion about why AI hallucinates
- [Snopes](#), [Google Fact Check Explorer](#), and [AIIides](#) - available for teacher modeling and demonstration before students use them independently

Created in partnership with the Mark Cuban Foundation, [markcubanai.org](http://markcubanai.org)