The Thinking Toolbox

Thirty-Five Lessons That Will Build Your Reasoning Skills

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Christian Logic
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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.royalbuckinghampalacewebsite.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?


   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.)
Lesson 13

Are You Primary or Secondary?

A primary source is an eyewitness, somebody who saw an event with his own eyes or heard it with his own ears.

Great Great Grandpa: Yep. I saw it with my own two eyes. I was young back in those days, 'bout fifteen. I was standin' back of the barn when I sees young Georgie – that’s what we called him then – come round the corner with a hatchet. Then he commences hackin’ away on that cherry tree. I don’t know why he did it, didn't seem like his pa would care for him choppin’ down the cherry tree. But he continues a hackin’, smilin’ all the while, till the little tree falls. Yep, I saw it happen all right.’

Great Great Grandpa is a primary source for what happened when the}
young George chopped down a cherry tree – he was there and actually saw the event himself.

If Great Great Grandpa didn’t see the cherry tree chopped down himself, but heard about it from somebody else, he would be a secondary source.

A secondary source is not an eyewitness, but is someone who heard the story from somebody else.

PA: Yes, son, my great great grandpa told me all about what happened. Little George was there in front of his dad, when his dad says to him: “Son, do you know anything about my cherry tree out behind the barn? It seems somebody has chopped it down.” Then George pipes up: “Father, I cannot tell a lie; I chopped down that cherry tree.” “Okay, son,” his father says, “go to the woodshed out back and cut for me a large switch. Your honesty surely won’t save you from a thrashing.”

Because he hadn’t been born yet, Pa didn’t actually see the scene he describes. However, he did hear about it from somebody else. Pa is a secondary source.

When we study history, there are many sources which tell us what happened at a particular event. Some of these sources are primary sources, and some of them are secondary sources.

When we read a history book, we often read an account written by somebody who was not there. The authors of history books will research an event, read about what happened, then write about it in their own words. It might come as a shock to you, but the things you read in a history book aren’t necessarily true. They are often the author’s interpretations of an event. This brings us to our second rule for analyzing sources.
工具包含的反对观点

规则：主次来源

主来源一般比次来源更可靠，因为一个故事在传给下一个人时可能会改变。史学家认为，真正见证了事件的主来源通常比只听说的人次来源更准确。这是因为每次有人将一个故事传给下一个人时，他可能会增加一些东西。

儿子：乔治·华盛顿是个很酷的人。我父亲告诉我关于他的一切。他说，当乔治十七岁的时候，他的父亲给了他一把长七英尺、重四十磅的斧头。乔治用它砍倒了二十棵樱桃树，然后告诉了他的父亲。他的父亲对他非常生气，把他关了一个星期。

这并不完全是父亲告诉他的。儿子在增加父亲的故事来让它更有趣。

这并不意味着历史书没有用。我们应该在想了解一个事件的概述时阅读历史书。有时观看关于一个事件的电影可能是个好主意。如果电影是好的，它可能会让我们对事件和它设定的时期感到兴奋。然而，观看像《乱世佳人》或《逃狱五人组》这样的电影时，我们必须谨慎。电影制作人想让他们的电影具有戏剧性和娱乐性。他们可能会使过去的事件看起来比实际上更刺激。

八卦——喜欢传播别人流言蜚语的人——几乎总是次来源，因为他们通常会重复从内丝，内丝从拉尔夫的妹妹玛丽特，妹妹……
Exercises

A. 1. What is the rule for primary and secondary sources?

B. Say whether each of the following examples is a primary or a secondary source.

2. **History book**: In the area west of the Mississippi from the period 1870-1892, often referred to as the “wild west,” nearly everybody wore a gun – except Quakers and heroines. Saloons were often the scene of rough fist-fights. Men, often intoxicated, would throw other men through saloon windows or through swinging doors. Due to mislabeled shipments of balsa wood to the American west, chairs were also built to a much lower tolerance. During this period, black was the most popular color for hats, if you were a villain. Heroes most often wore white.

3. “After we jumped into the water, it was every man for himself. I waded parallel to the beach with my squad because the heavy fire was directed towards the boats. As I was going straight towards the beach, I saw Lieutenant Hilscher go down on his knees as a shell exploded. He fell into the hole caused by the explosion. He died there on the beach... When I finally reached the edge of the water, I started to run towards the seawall under a deafening roar of explosions and bullets. I saw a hole about seventy-five feet away, so I ran and jumped in, landing on top of O. T. Grimes.” – Sergeant Warner Hamlett on D-Day, 1944.

4. “Yes, sir. I was there. Leastways, my son was. Butch Cassidy came into the bank and said to the teller, “Hand over all the money, and nobody gets hurt.” He had a bag in his hands and the teller commenced to fillin’ it with bills. When he was done, Butch strolls out the door real cool-like. That man sure could rob a bank.”

5. “Here it comes, ladies and gentlemen, and what a sight it is, a thrilling one, a marvelous sight. The sun is striking the windows of the observation deck on the westward side and sparkling like glittering jewels on the background of black velvet. Passengers are looking out the windows
waving. The ship is standing still now. The vast motors are just holding it, just enough to keep from. . . . It’s broken into flames! It’s flashing . . . flashing! It’s flashing terrible . . . oh, oh, oh! . . . It’s burst into flames! . . . Oh my, this is terrible, oh my, get out of the way please! It is burning, bursting into flames and is falling. . . . Oh! This is one of the worst catastrophes in the world! Oh! It’s a terrible sight. . . . Oh! and the humanity and all the passengers! I told you, it’s a mass of smoking wreckage.

Honest, I can hardly breathe. I’m going to step inside [the hangar] where I can’t see it. . . . It’s terrible. I – I – folks, I’m going to have to stop for a moment because I’ve lost my voice. This is the worst thing I’ve ever witnessed.” – Herbert Morrison, reporter for Chicago radio station WLS, describing the crash of the Hindenburg (May 6, 1937)

6. PROSECUTING ATTORNEY: Can you tell me what happened on the night in question, ma’am?
MISS HOUSEMEN: Yes, I can. I was standing on the street corner when that man right there went into the bank. He had a gun in one hand and an empty bag in the other. A minute later I saw him coming out. He still had the gun, and the bag was full of money.

7. “About sixty-five million years ago a meteor about two miles wide struck the earth. The meteor’s impact, followed by extended darkness from dust and debris thrown into the atmosphere, followed by more climate changes, weakened the last remaining dinosaurs to the point of extinction.”

8. SAM: Did you know that the movie The Great Escape is a true story? I watched it last night. In it, Big X escapes from a German prisoner-of-war camp and then gets recaptured by the Gestapo.

9. Encyclopedia Britannica: The cheetah is a tawny-coated, black-spotted cat native to Africa and Southwest Asia, the fastest land animal, capable of running at speeds of up to seventy miles per hour.
Answer Key
not loyal; in fact, they often turn on their masters.

3. Answers will vary. Possible answer: Monarchy is a better form of government than democracy.

4. Answers will vary. Possible answer: Henry the Eighth was the best ruler England ever had.

5. Scientist Sedgwick

6. Bert. He isn’t disagreeing with the other two; he is just pointing out a different fact.

7. Derf

8. Enrod

9. None. They each have a different point of view about the war. Hans disagrees with the other two by saying they shouldn’t argue about it.

10. C, d, e (this is a circular argument), g, and j.

Lesson 11: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly Evidence

1. C. Strong

2. C. Strong

3. None. No piece of evidence seems to stand out as strong or weak. Raymond doesn’t have enough information to make a smart decision – assuming robbing a house could ever be a smart decision. Hopefully the Pringles’ security measures will work.

Lesson 12: You Can’t Believe Everything You Hear

1. If you don’t know how a source obtained its information – how he knows what he knows – then the source should be considered unreliable.

2. We wouldn’t.

3. I would believe him if I were you.

4. We wouldn’t trust him.

5. If they know the facts already, why are they asking you? We wouldn’t believe them.

6. We would say this is a reliable source.

7. B.

8. We wouldn’t forward this. Since this e-mail says Microsoft’s Web site has confirmed it, you could
check the Microsoft Web site.

9. We wouldn’t forward this. You could visit KFC’s website to see if they reference chicken. You could ask the University of New Hampshire to see if they did such a study. Or you could tour the KFC packing plant.

Lesson 13: Are You Primary or Secondary?

1. Because a story can change as it passes from one person to the next, a primary source is generally more reliable than a secondary source.

2. Probably a secondary source.

3. Primary source.

4. Secondary source.

5. Primary source.

6. Primary source.

7. Secondary source.

8. Sam is a primary source for what happened in the movie, but not for whether the movie is a true story.


Lesson 14: Who Has a Reason to Lie?

1. We should prefer the testimony of someone who does not have a reason to lie over someone who does.

2. No reason to lie.

3. Reason to lie. Bert wants to get Scotty to go to the movie.

4. No reason to lie.

5. Reason to lie. He wants to get the union behind the candidate.

6. No reason to lie.

7. Reason to lie. They sell gold themselves.

8. No reason to lie.

9. Reason to lie. He might want to become famous and be quoted in magazines.

10. Reason to lie. He sells the pills.

11. We would question this for reliability because we do not know where it is coming from.

12. No reason.

13. No reason.


15. Reason to lie.

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