YOUR CONNECTED LIFE:

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO LIFE ONLINE

Media Smarts
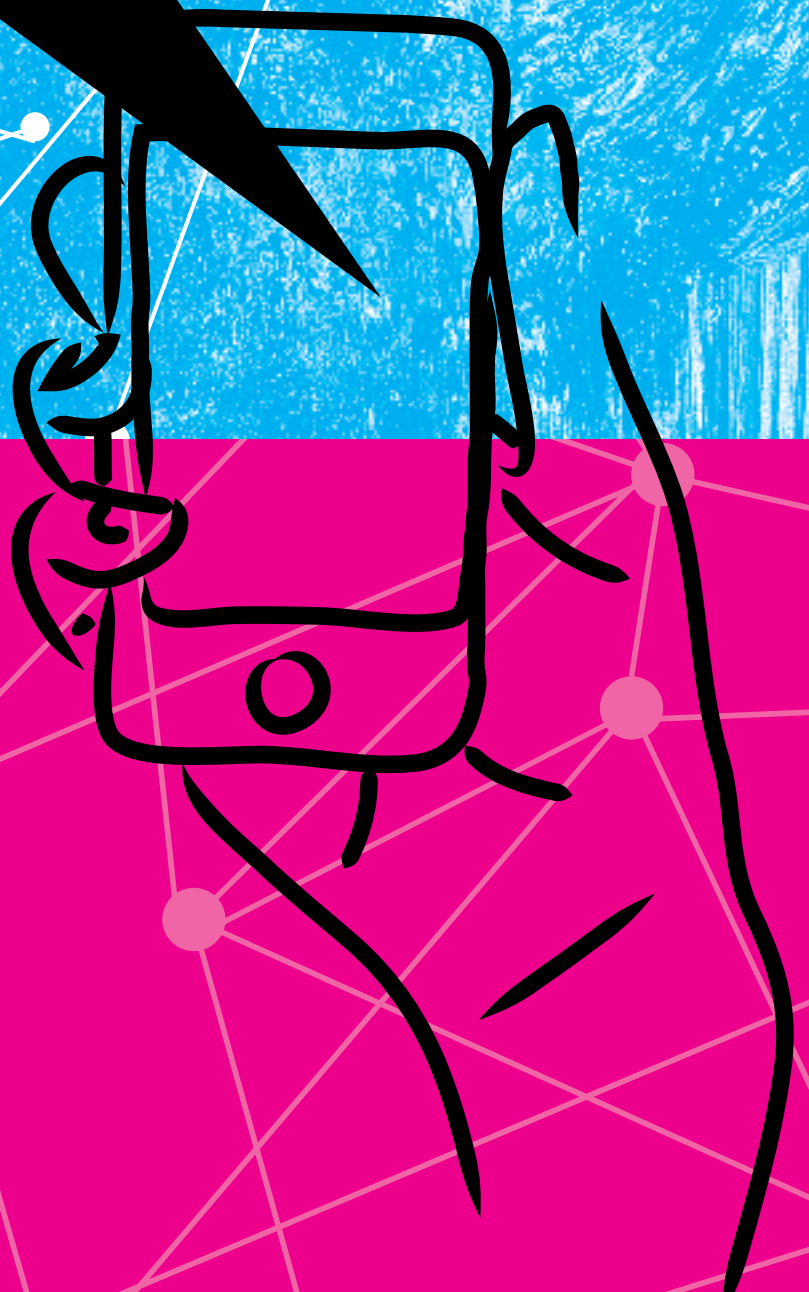
SUPPORTED BY

Shaw)

WELCOME *to high school!*

YOU'RE GOING TO BE BUSY THIS YEAR: learning how to get around school, sorting out your classes and making new friends. Your digital life is about to get much busier too. So you may need some help figuring out things like balancing screen time with school work, managing your relationships and reputation online, and using the Internet to find the best information on health, hobbies and homework. This guide will help you spot potential problems and has teen-tested tips and solutions for staying on top of things before they get out of hand!

YOUR STUFF

YOUR REPUTATION

THINGS YOU POST ONLINE can last a long time and be seen by people you aren't expecting: your parents, a future boyfriend or girlfriend or someone who might give you a job someday. This means you have to think about your online reputation every time you post something.

Things that can affect your reputation:

- What you post on social media
- Comments you leave on other people's social media pages
- How you behave in online games
- Things by or about you that are posted or shared by other people

Here's something else to think about: Every time a friend shares something with you, you have to decide whether you are going to pass it on, or leave it be. Your decision can have consequences.

Real life script

What should you do if someone posts a photo of you that you don't want anyone to see? Just send a quick message to the person who posted it to take it down – it usually works! Try this: "Hey, you know that photo you posted of me yesterday? I don't really like it. Can you please delete it?"

TIPS

It's important to press the pause button and take a second to think before you post anything online. Ask yourself:

- Is this how I want people to see me?
- Could somebody use this to hurt me? Would I be upset if they shared it with others?
- What's the **worst** thing that could happen if I shared this? (For example: my parents might ground me, my friends might get mad at me, I might look silly.)

Most social networks – like Facebook – have settings to control who sees what you post. Many of them also let you set privacy settings for individual posts, so that only the people you want to can see it. It's a good idea to stay up to date with Facebook privacy settings because they change all the time.

If you're tagged in a photo you don't like, most social networks will let you remove the tag. If you don't want the photo to be up at all, ask the person who posted it to take it down – this usually works!

The best way to avoid getting anyone mad is to ask before sharing or tagging anyone in a photo – even if it's a good one – because you never know how they're going to feel about it.

If a photo:

- makes someone look bad
- embarrasses them, or
- could hurt them if it got around

Don't pass it on!

YOUR FRIENDS

SOMETIMES WE DON'T REALIZE how things we do and say online affect how other people feel.

TIPS

When we're online or texting, we don't see or hear a lot of the things that let us know how someone is feeling, like the look on their face or how their voice sounds. Don't forget, there are people on the other side of the screen. Think about how they might interpret what you're saying.

Smileys and other emojis can make a big difference in terms of how someone interprets what you've posted. If you're making a joke, make sure your friend knows that. But remember, just *saying* something's a joke doesn't make it okay to say something mean!

If somebody does something online that makes you mad, start by assuming that they *didn't* mean it. Give them the benefit of the doubt. If something *you* say makes someone mad, stop to think that you might have hurt their feelings without meaning to. Either way, if you talk to them face-to-face it might help you see things more clearly.

> "I usually talk to them at school or face-to-face asking them 'did you post that?' and they're like "oh I'm so sorry, I'll take you out or I'll take off the tag or whatever"
>
> – Katie, Toronto

If you see something online that upsets you, take some time to cool down. If your heart is racing or you feel tense, it's time for a break: get up and go do something – make a snack, take a walk, read a book, or sleep on it.

Most Canadian kids don't do mean things to people online, don't download illegal stuff, and don't share sexts or other embarrassing pictures – even if your friends are telling you that "everybody does it."

HELPING YOUR FRIENDS

WHEN YOU SEE OR HEAR bad things happening online, *you* have a lot of power to make things better – or worse. Sometimes it's hard to know the right thing to do, so ask yourself these questions before jumping in:

Do I know the whole story? Sometimes what you're seeing may not be as clear as you think it is. What looks like bullying may actually be someone fighting back against a bully, and what looks like just a joke might really hurt someone's feelings. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do anything, but it does mean you need to think about what the *best* way to help is.

Am I helping, or just helping my friends? We all want to help our friends, and we count on our friends to help us. But before you take your friend's side, ask yourself if you'd do the same thing if he or she *wasn't* your friend. If you're *not* going to help someone, ask yourself if you'd do the same thing if he or she *was* your friend.

Am I making excuses for what's happening? Sometimes we come up with reasons *not* to do something that we know is the right thing to do. A lot of the time those reasons are based on the values of the group we're in. Ask yourself if you're doing any of these:

- Minimizing it ("It's just a joke.")
- Denying it ("That wouldn't hurt my feelings, so she can't really be hurt.")
- Blaming the target ("He deserved it.")
- Avoiding it ("Nobody else is doing anything about it.")

Will this make things better or worse? There are a lot of things you can do to help someone who's being bullied, but some things work better than others at different times – and some can sometimes make things worse.

Did you know?

Two-thirds of Canadian students have helped someone who was being picked on online.

What should you do to help?

Here's a list of things you can do that kids who have been targets of bullying say usually make things better:

- Spend time with me
- Talk to me and encourage me
- Help me get out of the situation
- Distract the bully
- Help me tell an adult I trust
- Tell an adult I trust on my behalf

Kids also say that telling a bully to stop can sometimes make things better – although it can also make the situation worse. Before you do this, ask yourself:

- Does the victim want me to speak out?
- Will speaking out make the bully more angry?
- Will speaking out increase the bullying when I'm not around?
- Will speaking out turn it into a fight?

YOUR ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS

HOW DO YOU KNOW when an online relationship is bad for you?

Sometimes people do mean things online that aren't just drama – things like seriously threatening you or trying to hurt or embarrass you on purpose.

There are some people who use the Internet to find girlfriends or boyfriends who are a lot younger than they are. Most of the time, they don't hide what they're doing: they're looking mostly for girls in their early teens, as well as boys who are or think they might be gay or bisexual, and they take advantage of kids who don't understand that it's not healthy for them to have a sexual relationship with an adult.

Relationships with people your age can be unhealthy too, for example, if one person is violent or tries to control the other. Other examples: harassment, or threatening you with sexual texts or posts, stalking you, making you check in all the time, making you disconnect from your other friends, spreading lies or rumours about you, pressuring you to send sexy pictures or threatening to share ones you've already sent.

Beyond Drama

If someone is mean to you or threatens you online, don't fight back: they may just want to get a rise out of you, and if you fight back you may be the one who gets in trouble. Save the evidence with a screenshot (see www.take-a-screenshot.org for how to do this) and talk to somebody – a friend, your parents, or a helpline like Kids Help Phone (www.kidshelpphone.ca). Remember: nothing you do makes it okay for people to be mean to you. If someone is mean to you, that's their problem – not yours. (That doesn't mean it's okay for you to be mean to someone else, either – even if they were mean to you or your friends first!)

You can also report mean behaviour. See www.cyberbullying.us/report for how to report bullying in different online spaces such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

One in three Canadian kids say that when someone was mean or cruel to them online it was "sometimes" or "often" a serious problem.

Abusive Relationships

Remember that even if someone older is nice to you and you really like them, teens just aren't ready to get romantically involved with adults. If someone older won't leave you alone, block them.

If your boyfriend or girlfriend tries to pressure you into doing something that you don't want to do or that makes you uncomfortable, you should talk to your parents, your friends, an adult you trust or a helpline about it.

If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, don't get into things like keeping tabs on where they are or watching who they're texting or talking to online. Don't ever ask your girlfriend or boyfriend for a picture or anything else that they don't want to share.

YOUR GAMING

ONLINE GAMES ARE REALLY POPULAR, and can take up a lot of your time: in fact, they're designed to keep you playing and coming back. Game-makers have lots of tricks for keeping you in the game, like levels and badges, new areas to explore and random rewards. (Rewards are actually a more powerful way to keep you playing than making new levels, because you can win one any time you're playing the game.) Multiplayer games can be even harder to turn off, because you don't want to let down other players in your group.

Playing games is the most popular online activity for both boys and girls until Grade 8 – after that, social networking is #1!

Most free games aren't really free: you pay for some with your attention, by looking at ads or branded characters while you play, or with your personal information when you fill out quizzes or surveys. Other games start out for free, but then you have to pay to get the best stuff.

If you need to enter a credit card number to play a game, stop and think. Proceed with caution to make sure you don't rack up any unwanted charges.

TIPS

Pay attention to how you feel when you stop playing. If you're mad or upset, or can't stop thinking about when you'll get to play again, you may want to cut down your gaming. If you're forgetting to eat or missing hockey practice, it might be time to take control. Get into the habit of calling it quits after each major achievement: it feels great when you earn a badge, get a new power or unlock a new level of a game, and that feeling can make you want to keep playing.

Watch out for the sneaky ways companies try to get you to pay extra in games:

- **Power-ups**: In games where you're playing against other people, the game may be free but you can pay to get powers or weapons other people don't have.

- **Skip-aheads**: Other games make you do boring things a lot of times to get ahead, like planting crops or mining for gold. If they do, they'll usually let you pay real money to skip it.

- **Personalization**: Another thing "free" games will get you to pay for is making your character, or the place you live, different from everyone else's. If you want to look different, you'll have to pay for it!

Taking a Stand in Gaming Communities

Although online games are lots of fun, they're also places where you can run into mean behaviour and inappropriate content and language.

Even if it seems like a lot of players put down or threaten people in a game – or make racist, sexist or homophobic comments – that doesn't make it okay. You can report those things when you see them, defend the people who are targets and stand up to it.

If you spot someone being mean or rude in an online game, don't stand by and watch it happen. Addressing it can be as simple as sending a message: "Hey buddy. That's not cool."

> If something bad happens I log out. You can report people for being inappropriate or saying bad language.
>
> **— Amy, Toronto**

You are more powerful than you think.

Just one person speaking out in a group can change how other people think and act.
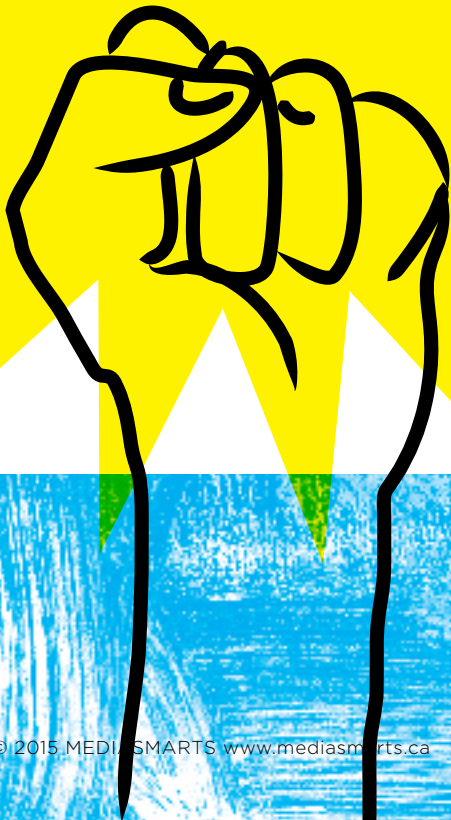
YOUR HEALTH

IT'S NOT JUST GAMES THAT CAN TAKE OVER YOUR LIFE: a lot of people find it hard to control their texting and checking out their social network profiles (even parents!). Balancing your digital life with everything else you have to do can be hard.

> "You feel like you need to be perfect, or live up to everyone's expectations of you.
> —**Lynda, Ottawa**

When we spend a lot of time on social networks, we may feel like everyone else is having more fun than we are. That's because while all of us live through the good and bad parts of our lives, we generally only see the "highlights reel" posted online.

A lot of kids, especially girls, feel like they need to look a certain way in the photos they post online. This can cause a lot of pressure to only share "perfect" photos. Girls whose photos are seen by their friends as "too sexy" can get a lot of nasty comments as well.

Four out of five Grade 9 students in Canada who own mobile phones sleep with them so they won't miss texts or updates.

TIPS

Taking Control

Log out of all your social networks and turn off your phone at bedtime – totally off. Not only will you be better rested, but there's no chance of "sleep-texting" something silly or embarrassing! Take a "social networking" vacation, even if it is only for one day, it will calm your mind and give you more time for other things like hobbies, exercising or just hanging out with friends or family. Amazing things can happen if you leave your device on the charger for a day!

Avoiding Pressure

Think about how you and your friends share, comment on, or talk about each other's photos. Even if a lot of people leave mean comments or make fun of people online, that doesn't make it okay.

Don't compare yourself to people you see online – including your friends. Remember that people usually just post their good news and their best pics online – and a lot of people edit their photos and use filters to make them look as good as possible.

#FOMO

Do you have F.O.M.O?

(Fear Of Missing Out?) It might be time to cut back or tune out for a while.

YOUR ENTERTAINMENT

IF YOU'RE GETTING YOUR MOVIES, games, TV and music online it's good to know what's legal to do in Canada – and what's not. For example, did you know that it's illegal to download copyright protected things like movies or music without permission from the owner? It's really pretty simple: before watching, listening or playing anything online, we need to think about whether we're doing it in a way that shows respect for the people who made it and own it.

Don't think that cheating a big company is different from cheating a person. For one thing, artists sell and license the stuff they make to companies to earn a living: if companies stop buying their work because they aren't making money, it's the artists who suffer.

Half of all Canadian students say they want to learn more about what's legal and illegal to do online.

TIPS

The good news is there are lots of places you can stream or download things legally:

At www.pro-music.org and www.wheretowatchincanada.ca you can find places to stream and download music and videos.

At www.mediabreaker.org you can remix media to make your own mash-ups.

YOUR ONLINE SHOPPING

WHILE ONLINE SHOPPING IS SUPER CONVENIENT, there are things that could cause you problems if you're not careful. For one thing it's easy to get carried away – until the credit card bill comes in!

As well, scammers take advantage of how much we love online shopping, offering deals that are too good to be true and selling things that are fake, damaged, stolen or don't exist at all.

TIPS

Before buying anything online, check out who you'll be doing business with. A lot of sites have user ratings, so you can tell if other people have had a bad experience with a seller, and you can do a search for reviews of products and services before buying them. If a website or product has no reviews online, it may be worth waiting a little while to see what other people have to say about it.

To avoid overspending, pay for your online shopping with a gift card or a prepaid credit card. This can help you avoid spending too much (and also keep you from losing too much if you get scammed!)

On sites where you're buying things, check for the closed padlock icon or a web address that starts with "https". Those mean that it's safe to enter your credit card number.

Read the fine print and make sure you won't be charged extra for shipping or duty! If you're shopping on a U.S. website you could end up paying extra, even more than the cost of what you're buying.

YOUR DATA

IMAGINE THAT PEOPLE AT THE MALL ARE FOLLOWING YOU around and watching everything you do so they'll know what you might want to buy when you get to their store. Sound creepy? That's exactly what happens every time you go online.

Besides being creepy, it can cost you money. Did you know that people get offered different prices online depending on things like which browser they're using, where they're from, what other things they've bought and which other sites they've visited?

Don't think that nobody wants your data! Researchers have found that apps and websites aimed at young people have more trackers than ones aimed at adults.

> " Yeah, they own your pictures. Even if you delete them, they still have them. "
>
> **—Rebecca, Toronto.**

Who's tracking you online and why? Mostly it's websites, advertisers, and ad networks (which track you across many spaces online). These may all be the same company, and companies that collect your data also often sell it to other companies. Governments and police can also make your Internet provider hand over what they track. As well, some apps and websites ask for your location, using your GPS or your IP address, to customize their service (by finding things or people that are near you, for example).

What kinds of things can be tracked? Everything you do, including where you go online, what you click, how long you spend there, what you buy (or just look at), messages you send, and things you post.

Why are they tracking you? Tracking lets companies build a profile of you. This is mostly used to deliver targeted ads and other content.

Your web browsing is being tracked so stores can sell you more stuff.

TIPS

It's a good idea before signing up for a site to read the Privacy Policy to find out what they're going to track and what they are going to do with the stuff you post. Warning: they're often very long, and full of information that's hard to understand, but it's worth knowing what you're agreeing to give up before you sign up.

You can also choose to use services that don't track or collect data at all, like the search engine DuckDuckGo.

Some browsers (like Chrome or Firefox) let you turn on a "Do Not Track" setting. Some (though not all) websites won't collect your data if Do Not Track is turned on. (See www.donottrack.us for more info.)

The most common way that websites track you is through cookies. See www.allaboutcookies.org to find out how to control and clear them from your browser history.

Browser plugins like AdBlock Plus can keep you from having to see ads on websites and social networks.

You can also install browser plugins like Ghostery or Privacy Badger that let you see how different websites are tracking you and check to see how many trackers your favourite sites have.

Get in the habit of turning off your GPS, WiFi and Bluetooth when you're not using them. All of these can be ways companies and individuals can get your data and even hack your devices

And finally, to learn everything about how you are tracked online, check out this site: https://donottrack-doc.com/en/episodes/.

YOUR COMPUTER

There are plenty of viruses, scams and other threats that can damage your computer or make you lose control of it. Luckily, there are a few simple ways to protect yourself.

Malware: These programs — which may pretend to be something useful or install themselves by getting you to click a box — can hurt your computer or even take control of it. Teens are especially at risk from malware because it is often bundled with things they like to download like games and music.

Spyware: is a special kind of malware that collects information from your computer. Some spyware can even record everything you type.

Data theft: Your financial and personal info can be very valuable in the wrong hands!

Identity theft: Scammers can steal your online identity by getting access to your credit card or bank information or to other information you use to prove who you are.

Spam: Unwanted junk email can be a hassle, but it can be a security risk too: a lot of them are scams that try to get information from you by pretending to be from a bank or other business. This is called phishing.
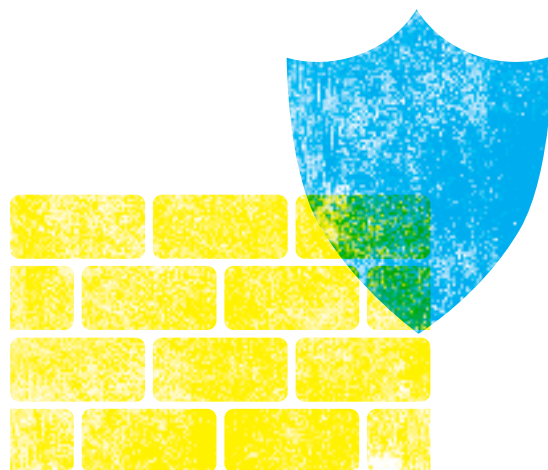
TIPS

Your browser is your first line of defense against malware, but you need to keep it updated. The same is true for any antivirus software that's on your computer.

Having a strong password – and keeping it secret – can protect your computer from a lot of online risks. Choose one that is at least seven characters long and don't use words that can be connected to you, like your pet's name. Change some of the letters to numbers or punctuation marks and use a mix of upper– and lower-case letters. Then customize the password for each site by adding the first and last letters of the site. (Bananas becomes B@nAn5s and then fb@nAn5sk as your Facebook password.)

Don't download stuff that you're not sure is legit. Odds are good that you could be downloading a virus.

Don't post your email address anywhere online and don't open emails from senders you don't know!

Use your email program to block senders or mark them as junk.

SCHOOL STUFF

TOO MUCH INFORMATION!

THE INTERNET IS AN AMAZING SOURCE OF INFORMATION – but sometimes you can get too much information, which can make it hard to find exactly what you need and to weed out things that you don't want. If you're not careful, you might stumble onto stuff you didn't want to find – whether it's totally irrelevant or inappropriate.

Just over one in three Canadian students use advanced search engine tools like limiting searches to a particular site.

TIPS

The better the keywords you use in your online search, the quicker you'll find what you need. So how do you figure out what words to use?

Your most powerful keyword combination is the phrase. Phrases are combinations of two or more words that appear in the documents you're searching for in the EXACT order shown: for example entering a phrase in quotation marks like "peanut butter" into a search engine will only give you results that have these words together.

If you find that you're not getting the results you want, you can use a minus sign to leave out results that include a certain word or phrase. You can also avoid unwanted results, like mature or offensive sites, by changing the search settings. For Google, click Settings and then turn on Safe Search. In Bing, click Preferences (the gear icon) and pick Strict or Moderate Safe Search.

If there's one site that you know is reliable, most search engines will let you limit your search to only that site. Just add the web address at the end of your search string, like this: *peanut butter cookie recipe site:www.allrecipes.com (Don't* put a space between *site:* and the web address.)

GIVING CREDIT

COPYING STUFF FROM THE INTERNET is easy, but did you know that copying just one paragraph can make you fail an assignment? Plagiarizing from online sources doesn't only get you in trouble: you cheat your classmates who played fair, and you rob yourself of what you would have learned. (Would you want to be operated on by a doctor who cheated on his exams and doesn't really know what he's doing?)

Cheating is less common than you think! A 2009 study found that two-thirds of teens thought their classmates had used cell phones to cheat – but just one-third had done it themselves.

Using any content that you didn't write is plagiarism if you don't give credit – even if it's only a sentence, you have to show who wrote it and where you found it.

These things also count as plagiarism:

- Mixing things you wrote in with things someone else wrote.

- Using something someone else wrote but changing how it's said (changing "John A. MacDonald's greatest legacies were Confederation and the Canadian National Railway" to "MacDonald is most remembered for building a railway across Canada and joining the provinces"). This is called "paraphrasing."

- Using something someone else wrote and giving credit, but not adding anything of your own to it. (Essentially, using their words to write your essay and not doing any of the work yourself.)

- Using someone else's essay from another year or another school.

TIPS

It's easy to forget where you found everything when you're doing online research, so try to keep track of where you find different things at the research stage. If you copy anything directly, make sure to mark it in some way (*like by changing the colour of the text*) so you remember that you didn't write it. And so you can find and cite it later, cut and paste the URL and put this with the text too.

The easiest thing is always to quote anything that somebody else wrote. That means putting their words inside quotation marks ("Sir John A. MacDonald was the first Prime Minister of Canada") and then giving a *citation* to show who wrote it.

You can paraphrase, but make sure it's clear which is your writing and what's paraphrased. Always make sure that the paraphrase has a citation.

There are different ways to *cite* online sources so ask your teachers which ones they prefer. Here's a simple one that will show that you're not trying to plagiarize:

Lastname, firstname (date it was posted). "Title" (format). Retrieved from Web address.

Johnson, J.K. (2014). "MacDonald, Sir John Alexander" (article). Retrieved from http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/macdonald_john_alexander_12E.html

If there are two or more authors, use "Lastname, firstname and Firstname Lastname" (as in "Johnson, J.K and P.B. White") and if there's no author listed, start with the title. If you can't find the date it was posted, put "Accessed on" and then the date you found it online.

There are also bibliography websites that you can use to help you format the information you find online.

FACT VS. FICTION

THE INTERNET HAS PLENTY OF places to find information, but not all of them are created equal. Some are reliable, but others may be trying to persuade you or sell you things and some are just jokes.

Another important thing to watch for is bias. That's when a site only gives you one side of a story, or uses words that try to make you feel a certain way instead of trying to convince you with a reasonable argument.

Does it surprise you that Wikipedia is the most popular website for Canadian students to find information? Probably not – it has articles on everything! But you have to know how to use it properly. For example, it's important to know that all of the articles are written and edited by people who use Wikipedia. While that can mean that articles are more accurate and up-to-date than other sites, it can also mean that some articles are incomplete, inaccurate or biased.

Would you trust the website for the Federal Vampire and Zombie Agency? How about an article on the health risks of H_2O?

Wikipedia:

- If a Wikipedia article has a cleanup banner at the top that means the information in it isn't reliable. You can click the Talk and History tabs to see if the article has been changed a lot recently or if it's being debated. This is especially true about current events.

- If you're researching a particular topic on Wikipedia, you can also check the list of sources at the bottom of an article.

Other websites:

- Don't assume that a site is legit just because the web address sounds right. A lot of fake sites are set up with web addresses that are almost like the real one: the same web address may lead to very different websites depending on whether it ends in .ca or .org, for example.

- Don't trust a site just because it has a .org address either. For example, www.dhmo.org (warning about the risks of dihydrogen monoxide – better known as water) or www.fvza.org (the Federal Vampire and Zombie Agency).

- Make the web address as short as possible (for instance, mediasmarts.ca/tipsheets/deal-with-it would shorten to "mediasmarts.ca") to see the home page. Is it on the same topic as the page you found?

- Find out who wrote the content or is quoted in it. Try to find out if they're an expert on the subject by doing a search for their name and seeing what comes up.

- Try to identify what a site is trying to do: Inform you? Make you believe something? Sell you something? Make you laugh?

- Check to see if the site gives more than one point of view. Does it include or link to people with views on both sides of the issue?

- Does the site provide sources that back up what it says?

- Does the site use emotional language that tries to make you scared or angry? That's a sign that it's not reliable.

- If you read a claim that seems suspicious, check it out on an anti-hoax site like Snopes (www.snopes.com).

Nine in ten students check out information they need for school, but just over half verify what they read on blogs or social media. Make sure to use these tips whenever you're looking for info, not just for school!

Imagine that you did a search on "depression" and found the site www.mindyourmind.ca. How do you know if it's legit? Here's some ways you can check it out:

- The About page (www.mindyourmind.ca/about/about-mindyourmind) gives you the name, phone number and street address of the people behind the site. Nobody's trying to hide!

- Doing a search for "Mind Your Mind" shows that a lot of universities, school boards and government sites like it and link to it.

- Taking a look around the site shows that it's not trying to scare you or sell you anything. It uses clear, unbiased language to inform you about mental health issues.

- All of the articles end with links to the sources of their information.

10 TINY WAYS YOU CAN MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE TODAY

1 Smile....
at everyone. ☺
(MORGAN, 12)

2 Say thank you, and really mean it.
(SCOTT, 14)

3 Include or invite someone into whatever you are doing.
(BRYNN, 15)

4 Put your device away for a while when hanging out with friends.
(KATHY, 14)

5 Compliment a friend. It may be the first genuine compliment they've got in a while and it will brighten their day.
(IAN, 16)

6 Don't forward that rumour/chain letter/bad photo.
(SASHA, 13)

7 Help someone if they need help. Don't walk away.
(LINDSAY, 10)

8 Spread the word about good causes: don't be shy to share links to issues you care about (just make sure to check the source!)
(SARAH, 15)

9 If you don't have something nice to say, don't post it.
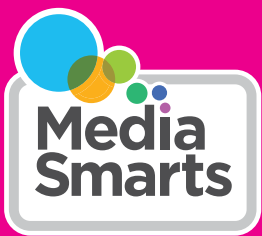**(HANA, 14)**

10 Whenever you can, give credit to the original poster when you share something online.
(SOPHIE, 14)

Media Smarts

CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY