

Kevin Pinkham  
College Writing I  
Spring 2021

Essay Three  
“Why Should I Trust This?”

According to a Pew Research Center report that came out at the end of July, 18% of Americans say their primary source of news is social media (<https://www.journalism.org/2020/07/30/americans-who-mainly-get-their-news-on-social-media-are-less-engaged-less-knowledgeable/>). As you might imagine, social media isn't the most reliable news source; certainly, social media websites were never originally designed to provide trustworthy news. But even if we're not turning to social media for our news, a simple Google search on a topic for an essay can wind up delivering dubious information as well. How can we know whom to trust when we're trying to make important decisions in our lives, such as whom we should vote for?

Using the guidelines that John Warner provides on pages 139-145 of *The Writer's Practice*, under the title “Why Should I Trust This (Understanding Sources),” your mission is to explore an article you find online, “1. Check[ing] for previous fact-checking work, 2. Go[ing] upstream from the source, and 3. Read[ing] laterally” (141). Most of this assignment will be doing research to check out the article you've chosen, then writing about your findings and the process you went through to come to your conclusions.

In this assignment, you'll want to briefly summarize your article, let readers know where you found it, and discuss your research and your insights. Your audience will be me, your classmates, and anyone you feel might benefit from reading your work—perhaps your angry uncle who retweets dubious claims.

You might consider putting a thesis statement at the end of your introduction. In the thesis statement, you might make a claim such as, “A recent article that claims that most Americans prefer to eat broccoli rather than donuts sounds doubtful, and further research reveals the article's claims fall apart largely because the source of the information in the article is the Broccoli Promotion Board.” Your introduction could open with a statistic like the one I shared above, or some background information for the article that you've chosen, or an interesting quotation connected to the topic of the article or a variety of other possible openings. Your second paragraph should probably provide your summary of the article. Subsequent body paragraphs will provide the details of your process and your discoveries. Your conclusion could bring us back to how you started the essay, reflecting on the quotation or the statistic you started with, or give us a warning on the importance of being careful about exploring our news sources.

You don't have to try to find a news article that you can prove "wrong." It's completely fine to find out that the article you've chosen turns out to be well-researched and accurate. The steps Warner walks you through are the real focus of the assignment, not trying to expose "fake news."

Final Draft Due: **Tuesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>**  
This essay is worth 10% of your final grade.

Like the "How Do I?" and "Should I?" essays, grading for this essay will be unconventional. Operating under the assumption that practice makes perfect, your grade will be determined by the amount of work you do; in other words, you get to determine the grade you will receive. The more you write, the better you will become (in theory, anyway). Here is how the grades will be determined:

The first thing you should know is that all plus grades (A+, B+, C+, D+) are reserved for recognition of quality work. I will make the **rare** choice to assign a plus grade to writers whose work is exemplary. Other than plus grades, the grades will be determined by what you turn in to the dropbox.

To get a grade of A, you must turn in a total of 2,500+ words.

To get a grade of A-, you must turn in a total of 2,250-2,500 words.

To get a grade of B, you must turn in a total of 2,000-2,250 words.

To get a grade of B-, you must turn in a total of 1,750-2,000 words.

To get a grade of C, you must turn in a total of 1,500-1,750 words.

To get a grade of C-, you must turn in a total of 1,250-1,500 words.

To get a grade of D, you must turn in a total of 1,000-1,250 words.

To get a grade of D-, you must turn in a total of 750-1,000 words.

To get a grade of F, you must turn in a total of 375-750 words.

To get a grade of 0, you must turn in fewer than 375 words.

You may be wondering how you can write 375-2,500 words for this assignment. Think of this assignment like a portfolio. At the core of the assignment will be the final essay you turn in and identify as the completed "Why Should I Trust This?" essay. In the document you turn into the dropbox, the actual completed essay should come first. I envision this essay being from three to

five double-spaced pages, depending on your topic. That should yield about 900 to 1,500 words. The rest of the word count can be reached by including the work you do for the *Process* section questions in steps 1 through 6 (for example, you could discuss how you found the article and why you chose it, you could provide any additional details you might have left out of the complete essay about the research you did to vet the article, you could recount the profile of the audience beyond our class you were envisioning for the essay, you could answer any questions Warren asks). You might consider including a reflection on how you implemented any feedback you received in step 5, and you could submit your responses to the *Reflect* and *Remix* sections. All together, you should be able to easily produce 2,500 words.