Activity 2: Exploring Key Terms

Working in your group, discuss the meaning of the key terms for this module: truth, lie, fact, and opinion. Be ready to report out after 30 minutes.

Activity 4: Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

Listed below are a series of statements that may be facts, may be opinions, or may be somewhere in between. Working in your group decide which of these is a fact, which is an opinion, and which is in between.

1. A square has four equal sides.
2. All birds have feathers.
3. Louisville is the capital of Kentucky.
4. The American school system is in bad shape.
5. The Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico.
7. Texas is the largest state.
8. French fries are not good for your health.
9. Smoking is not good for your health.
10. The United States gave the Panama Canal to Panama.
11. Men are usually taller than women.
12. Egyptian hieroglyphics were the earliest writing system.
14. America was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492.
15. Taxes are too high in America.
16. Glass is made from sand.
17. People in the Midwest are nicer than people who live on the East or West Coast.
18. The murder rate has gone up dramatically in the last twenty years.
19. Ivory-Billed Woodpeckers are extinct.
20. It’s rude to check your twitter feed during a college class.

Activity 6: Truths and Lies

Working in your group, answer the following questions related to the terms “truth” and “lie.”

1. Three people witness a traffic accident involving a Ford Mustang and a Toyota Prius. One witness, Allison, tells the investigating police officer she saw the Mustang driving very fast and failing even to slow down for a stop sign. The other witness, Miguel, tells police the Mustang approached the stop sign very slowly and came to a complete stop before driving through.
2. Assume that both witnesses are honest; neither is lying. Even though they contradict each other, is the statement that each of them made true? (Notice I’m not asking if anyone was lying. I’m not asking about the witnesses but only about the statements.)
3. Suppose a videotape of the accident was made by a nearby security camera. The tape reveals that the Mustang approached the intersection at 50 mph and didn’t slow at all for the stop sign.
4. What is the truth? Is there such a thing as absolute truth?
5. Can you speak the truth, but be wrong? If you speak what you are certain is true, and it later turns out not to have been true, did you tell the truth? Did you lie?
6. Think of as many examples as you can of facts that have changed over the years (How many planets are there?) Are there some kinds of facts that can’t change?

Activity 13: Reading “The Problem with Facts”

“The Problem with Facts,” Tim Harford’s essay from the Financial Times, gives a fascinating discussion of the strategy the tobacco companies used to combat the medical evidence that smoking causes cancer. Harford next discusses the rise of fact checking websites. He also explains why
trying to refute false statements by presenting facts is unlikely to succeed. Finally, he discusses the biased reaction to facts that results from tribal thinking.

Activity 14: Analyzing “The Problem with Facts”

Working in your group, answer the following questions about “The Problem with Facts.”

1. Describe the strategy the tobacco companies followed to resist any move to limit the sales of cigarettes.
2. Harford proposes several reasons why using facts in an argument or in a campaign may not work. Make a list of these reasons.
3. What is your response to the story of Stanley Prusiner? Why do you think Harford included it in his article?
4. Explain this statement, taken from the 11th paragraph from the end of Harford’s article: “When people are seeking the truth, facts help. But when people are selectively reasoning about their political identity, the facts can backfire.”

Activity 20: Reading “A Short History of Truth”

This excerpt from Julian Baggini’s A Short History of Truth accepts that we are living in an age when it is difficult to know what the truth is, but argues that we, nevertheless, still believe there is such a thing as truth. It argues that we have to rely on experts, but that finally, we have to make judgements for ourselves about who is an expert.

Activity 25: Reading “Identifying Expertise”

This excerpt from Daniel Levitin’s Weaponized Lies: How to Think Critically in the Post-Truth Era dives deeply into the concept of expertise. Levitin provides tools for recognizing the need to recognize limits on an expert’s knowledge, to evaluate sources of information, to determine who is behind websites, to recognize the value of peer review, and to evaluate how current a source is.

Activity 26: Writing About Experts

Write a short paper—a page or two, at the most—in which you describe three people you think of as experts in their fields. What is it about these people that qualifies them as experts in your view?

Activity 27: Discussing Baggini and Levitin

Working in groups, students will list the points about identifying expertise which Baggini and Levitin have in common and the points that they don’t have in common.

Activity 33: Researching Fact Checkers

In recent years, a number of websites have become available to “fact check” statements in the news. Five of these that are non-partisan are listed below:

- **Politifact** ([http://www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)) is sponsored by the Tampa Bay Times and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign. Politifact rates the accuracy of statements by politicians and advocacy groups as “True,” “Mostly True,” “Half True,” “False,” and “Pants on Fire” and provides detailed explanations of its ratings.

- **Factcheck.org** ([https://www.factcheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org)), founded in 2003, is the oldest of the fact checking sites. Factcheck.org is sponsored by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and primarily reviews TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases.

- **Ask FactCheck** ([https://www.factcheck.org/askfactcheck/](https://www.factcheck.org/askfactcheck/)) is a website sponsored by Factcheck.org that specializes in investigating false or misleading rumors that circulate on the internet.

- **The Washington Post Fact Checker** ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/?utm_term=.22a43ea8f467](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/?utm_term=.22a43ea8f467)) is a blog written by journalist Glenn Kessler and rates the truth of statements by politicians and advocacy groups by awarding “Pinocchios.” Four “Pinocchios” go to the most dishonest statements; none, to statements that are true.

Use at least three of these to evaluate a statement or rumor that is currently in the news or circulating on the internet. Write a short paper—a page or two—in which you report what you learned about the news item you were investigating and what you learned about the usefulness of these fact-checking web sites.

Activity 37: “How to Spot Fake News” (Text to Read)

How to Spot Fake News
By Eugene Kiely and Lori Robertson

Fake news is nothing new. But bogus stories can reach more people more quickly via social media than what good old-fashioned viral emails could accomplish in years past.

In 2008, we tried to get readers to rid their inboxes of this kind of garbage. We described a list of red flags—we called them Key Characteristics of Bogusness—that were clear tip-offs that a chain email wasn’t legitimate. Among them: an anonymous author; excessive exclamation points, capital letters and misspellings; entreaties that “This is NOT a hoax!”; and links to sourcing that does not support or completely contradicts the claims being made.

Those all still hold true, but fake stories—as in, completely made-up “news”—has grown more sophisticated, often presented on a site designed to look (sort of) like a legitimate news organization. Still, we find it’s easy to figure out what’s real and what’s imaginary if you’re armed with some critical thinking and fact-checking tools of the trade:

Consider the source.
Read beyond the headline.
Check the author.
What’s the support?
Check the date.
Is this some kind of joke?
Check your biases.
Consult the experts.

Activity 41: Reading “Tribalism”


In a 2017 essay in New York Magazine, Andrew Sullivan argues that America has evolved into a nation of

“two coherent tribes, eerily balanced in political power, fighting not just to advance their own side but to provoke, condemn, and defeat the other.

I mean two tribes whose mutual incomprehension and loathing can drown out their love of country, each of whom scans current events almost entirely to see if they advance not so much their country’s interests but their own. I mean two tribes where one contains most racial minorities and the other is disproportionately white; where one tribe lives on the coasts and in the cities and the other is scattered across a rural and exurban expanse; where one tribe holds on to traditional faith and the other is increasingly contemptuous of religion altogether; where one is viscerally nationalist and the other’s outlook is increasingly global; where each dominates a major political party; and, most dangerously, where both are growing in intensity as they move further apart.”

Sullivan also points out that “One of the great attractions of tribalism is that you don’t actually have to think very much. All you need to know on any given subject is which side you’re on. You pick up signals from everyone around you, you slowly winnow your acquaintances to those who will reinforce your worldview, a tribal leader calls the shots, and everything slips into place. After a while, your immersion in tribal loyalty makes the activities of another tribe not just alien but close to incomprehensible.”

The only hope to cure this malaise, he argues, requires “first recognizing our own tribal thinking. So much of our debates are now an easy either/or rather than a complicated both/and. In our tribal certainties, we often distort what we actually believe in the quiet of our hearts, and fail to see what aspects of truth the other tribe may grasp.”

Activity 42: Watching Video “Can a Divided America Heal?”
In this video, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt discusses how tribalism is dominating our political and social culture in America. Use the link below to watch Haidt’s TED Talk from November 2016.

To watch the video, click on this link: https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_can_a_divided_america_heal#t-215611

Activity 43: Are You a Tribalist?

In Activities 41 and 42, you heard a psychologist and read an author who argued that America is becoming a nation made up of two tribes of people who believe so strongly in their tribe’s positions that they cannot listen to differing views and so strongly that they view members of other tribes as, not just mistaken, but evil and dangerous.

Working in your group, discuss the following:

1. What tribes do members of your group belong to?

2. Sullivan asserts that members of a tribe "don’t actually have to think very much. All you need to know on any given subject is which side you’re on. You pick up signals from everyone around you, you slowly winnow your acquaintances to those who will reinforce your worldview, a tribal leader calls the shots, and everything slips into place. After a while, your immersion in tribal loyalty makes the activities of another tribe not just alien but close to incomprehensible.”

   Does this description fit you and your membership in one of these tribes?

3. Describe a time when you had a successful conversation with someone in an opposing tribe to yours.

Activity 46: Researching Truth

Think of an issue you would like to know the truth about, an issue like one of the following:

* whether we’re winning the war in Afghanistan
* whether drug companies overcharge
* whether immigrants increase the amount of crime in America
* whether universal health insurance in England results in long wait lists
* whether coffee is harmful to your health
* whether organic foods are beneficial to your health
* whether the murder rate in America has increased in the past ten years
* whether environmental rules are killing the coal industry
* any other topic you would like to know the truth about

Do some investigation to find out what the truth is about the topic you have chosen. Then write a short paper, a page would be plenty, in which you describe how you went about learning the truth. Note that you are not being asked to argue your position on the issue, but rather to explain how you decided what the truth is.

Where appropriate, discuss how the concepts you have been exploring in this unit helped you, concepts like “facts,” “opinion,” “fact checkers,” “experts,” “fake news,” and “tribal thinking.”

Activity 52: Assignment of Final Essay

The one thing Democrats and Republicans and liberals and conservatives seem to agree on is that the other side is spreading a lot of fake news, making statements that are not true. In that environment, it is important that people be able to make well-reasoned, evidence-based decision on important national issues. I designed this unit to help you develop the skills to make informed and thoughtful decisions about what you believe to be the truth.

The tools provided in this unit include the following:

* An understanding of key terms like “truth,” “lie,” “opinion,” and “fact.”
* An awareness of how fact checkers can be useful.
* How to identify and evaluate “experts.”
• A method for detecting fake news.
• An understanding of bias and objectivity in news reporting.
• An awareness of “tribal” thinking.

For this assignment, you will write a three-to-four-page essay in which, based on your evaluation of a number of websites, you make a recommendation on raising the minimum wage in your city or state. To reach your conclusion on this issue, you will need evaluate each of the websites making use of some of the tools listed above. You will probably want to include your evaluation of the websites as you support the position you are taking.

Be sure to provide appropriate citations for any words you quote, paraphrase, or summarize from the websites and to include a works cited list or list of references at the end of your essay.

The websites you will evaluate will include the five listed below as well as two additional sites that you locate. The websites listed below and the ones you select will all explore the effect of raising the minimum wage on jobs.

You may be a little worried that you simply don’t have enough information to make these evaluations. Don’t worry. Unless you have a doctorate in economics, you, like most of us, don’t have nearly as much information as we would like. Nevertheless, we need to make decisions. At some point, you may need to vote on raising the minimum wage where you live. Perhaps, the best advice is what Julian Baggini says at the end of the excerpt from A Short History of Truth: “[W]e cannot escape the exercise of our own woefully under-informed judgement. . . . Don't think by yourself but do think for yourself, not because you're wiser or smarter than other people but because ultimately that's what you have to do. No one can make up your mind for you, unless you make up your mind to let them.

So, here are the five websites we’ve selected for you. Remember, you need to locate two more that also address the effect of raising the minimum wage on employment. And then you need to write a three-to-four-page essay in which you evaluate the seven websites using the tools we covered in this unit (listed above).

1. https://www.epionline.org/oped/o161/
5. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/study-seattles-15-minimum-wage-worked_us_5959225be4b0326c0a8d118d

Activity 53: Getting Started on Final Essay

Working individually, students will begin work on their final essay (Activity 51), asking questions of each other or of the instructor as they dive in.

Descriptions of Activities to Accompany Sample Syllabus
The Reading/Writing Project on Truth
Writing Instruction

Activity 5: One Interesting Thing

Write a one-page essay in which you tell your instructor one interesting thing about the kind of person you are. He or she will be the audience for this assignment. He or she will be reading these papers to get to know each of you in the class but also to begin a discussion of how to make your writing more effective. Please provide concrete examples to back up what you write about yourself.

Activity 7: Thesis in One Interesting Thing

Students will receive copies of several of the essays written for Activity 3. At least one of these should be an essay with a single clear thesis, others should have thesis/unity problems such no thesis, more than one thesis, or a clear thesis at
the beginning but a different thesis by the conclusion. Working in groups, students discuss what the “one interesting thing” is in each of the essays from Activity 3 handed out today and discover what it means to write an essay organized around a single clear thesis.

Activity 12: Watching Video on the Writing Process

This 12-minute video demonstrates how recursive the processes of effective writers are.

Activity 15: Being Interesting

Study the list of theses from the papers you and your classmates wrote for Activity 7.

Each group’s task is to read over these statements and select the five that seem most likely to produce interesting papers. Remember the assignment was to “tell me one interesting thing about the kind of person you are.”

Study the five you select and attempt to come up with some ideas about what makes a thesis statement interesting. The groups will report out after about twenty minutes.

Activity 21: Supporting a Thesis

We have taken the thesis statement below and brainstormed a list of five kinds of evidence we might use if we were going to write an essay about it.

Thesis: The U.S. should not attempt to overthrow rulers of Near Eastern countries, even if they are tyrannical dictators.

1. Examples of countries in which we have intervened with results that are disastrous (Iran, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya)
2. The numbers of Americans who died in several of our wars
3. The number of civilians who died in several of these wars
4. It is morally wrong for one country to attempt to dictate who rules in another country.
5. Statements by respected officials like former Secretary of State Colin Powell has argued that we should not attempt such interventions.

Below are six possible thesis statements. Working with your group, select one of the following thesis statements and make a list of all the kinds of evidence that would help support it.

1. We need laws in this country that would make it less likely that guns will end up in the hands of violent or mentally unstable people.
2. Laws to limit people from buy guns will not keep guns out of the hands of violent or mentally unstable people.
3. The American people are losing their morality.
4. The American people are becoming more moral.
5. America is becoming more unfair than it used to be.
6. America isn’t perfect, but it is fairer than it used to be.

Activity 28: Identifying Sentences

In the past, you may have been taught this traditional definition of a sentence: “A sentence is a group of words containing a subject and a verb and expressing a complete thought.” If that definition works for you, of course, continue to use it. But my experience has been that it doesn’t work for many students . . . especially the “complete thought” part.

Instead of the traditional definition, I suggest you use a “test frame” devised by Rei Noguchi, a linguist and English teacher who taught for years at California State University, Northridge.

Here’s the test frame:

A sentence is a group of words that makes sense when placed on the line below:

They refused to believe the idea that ________________________________
And here’s how it works. If you have written a group of words and are not sure whether they are a sentence or not, you place the words on the blank line in the test frame and then read the entire sentence, beginning with “They refused to believe,” out loud. If that sentence “makes sense,” then the group of words is a sentence. If it doesn’t “make sense,” your group of words is not a sentence.

For example, imagine you have written “The woman running after the bus.” Now you are not sure whether that group of words is actually a sentence, so you place it on the blank line in the “test frame” and then read it out loud: “They refused to believe the idea that the woman running after the bus.” Clearly that sentence doesn’t “make sense,” so your original group of words is not a sentence.

One more example, you have written “She placed it in her refrigerator.” To see whether that group of words is a sentence, you place it on the blank line in the test frame and then read the entire sentence out loud: “They refused to believe the idea that she placed it in her refrigerator.” That sounds fine, so the original group of words is a sentence.

Activity 29: Identifying Sentences

Working in groups, decide whether each of the following is or is not a sentence, using the information in the box above to make your decisions. On the line before each number, enter an S for sentence or an N for not a sentence.

_______ 1. The woman smoking a cigarette in the parking lot.
_______ 2. I found it in the back seat of my car.
_______ 3. The teacher who gave me a D last semester in math.
_______ 4. When Jorge learned that he had been promoted to manager.
_______ 5. The children cried.
_______ 6. Lashawn knew the answer.
_______ 7. The only question that I missed on the exam.
_______ 8. If Tawanda answers the phone and starts laughing.
_______ 10. Saving money is not easy.

Activity 31: Developing a Stronger Argument

At its most basic, the content of an essay consists of something like these five components:

• Introduction
• Supporting argument 1
• Supporting argument 2
• Supporting argument 3
• conclusion

These five components can make a perfectly satisfactory essay, but there are many other components that can make your essay more interesting, more convincing, and more thoughtful, as outlined below. Think about including some of these in your next essay.

Ways to Make Essays More Interesting and more convincing:

1. **Add more supporting arguments.** Just because you’ve come up with three reasons that support the position you have taken in your thesis, there is no reason to stop thinking. Most essays can be made more convincing if they include more reasons, more arguments, to support the thesis.

2. **Provide definitions of key terms.** If there are several words or phrases that are central to your argument, you may want to use a paragraph near the beginning of your essay to explain how you will be using them. For example, if you’re writing about juvenile delinquency, you may want to explain what that term will mean in your discussion. It’s not that you think your reader has never heard of the term; it’s just that it has a wide range of meanings, and you want to make clear what you mean when you use the term. Does it, for example, include juveniles who commit murder? How about juveniles who spray paint graffiti?

3. **Recognize negative effects.** Your thesis may be a good idea, and you may have presented a number of positive outcomes that will result from it, but it is often a good strategy also to admit that there are some negative outcomes that may result. Recognizing these can add to your credibility. They demonstrate that you are knowledgeable enough to be aware of these negatives and honest enough to admit they exist. Of course, it is a good idea if you can also explain why these negatives are less serious than they appear or how they can be mitigated.
4. **Recognize what opponents may say.** Closely related to recognition of negative effects is the recognition of opponents’ arguments, especially if those arguments are well known. Summarize them as objectively as you can and then answer, rebut, or counter them.

5. **Include some history of the topic you’re writing about.** How long has it been an issue? What positions have others taken about it?

6. **Make suggestions for implementation.** If you are trying to convince your reader to agree with you about some issue, it can be a great idea to include some advice, toward the end of the essay, about what steps will be needed to implement the change you are proposing.

7. **Make a call to action.** Even stronger than advice about implementation is a call to action, urging the reader not just to begin implementing some change, but to actually commit to some cause.

8. **Include background about who you are and/or why you decided to write about the topic.** Especially if it makes you a more credible author or demonstrates you are an author with a particular viewpoint, it can be very helpful to take a paragraph or two to give the reader some information about who you are and why you are writing about the topic.

**Activity 32: Strengthening Your Argument**

Using the suggestions in Activity 31, revise the paper you wrote for Activity 26 to make it more interesting, more convincing, and more thoughtful. Bring both the original version and the revised version of your paper to class.

**Activity 34: Evaluating Revisions**

Class discussion of several of the papers written for Activity 26 and revised for Activity 32.

**Activity 35: Evaluating Revisions, Continued**

Continuation of class discussion of several of the papers written for Activity 26 and revised for Activity 32.

**Activity 36: Identifying Independent Clauses**

In the following sentences, the independent clauses have been underlined. Working in groups, use what you have already learned about sentences to study these and figure out what an independent clause is. Write a one paragraph definition of an independent clause.

Then write another paragraph that explains the difference between an independent clause and a sentence?

1. The phone rang, and my dog started barking.
2. When it rains, my knees ache.
3. Javier tried to solve the puzzle.
4. Kristen laughed out loud when she heard the news about Craig.
5. Mark graduates in June, and his sister graduates next year.
6. Because of the snow, the parade was cancelled.
7. Sarah is buying a new car this afternoon.
8. Riding a bicycle in the city can be dangerous.
9. Charlene made a salad, and Corey roasted a chicken.
10. If Sarah comes to class tomorrow, I will invite her to the party.

**Activity 39 Punctuating Independent Clauses**

In the following pairs of items, the sentence in black is correct, and the sentence in red has an error. Study these sentences and figure out which grammar rule they demonstrate.

**Pair 1**
- Tom lives in Overlea, and his brother lives in Parkville.
- Tom lives in Overlea and his brother lives in Parkville.

**Pair 2**
- Drew bought a laptop, but he has not learned how to use it.
• Drew bought a laptop but he has not learned how to use it.

Pair 3
• Kyesha went to the ocean, and it rained every day.
• Kyesha went to the ocean and it rained every day.

Pair 4
• Maria works at a bakery, but she is looking for a second job.
• Maria works at a bakery but she is looking for a second job.

In the next set of sentences, again the black version is correct, and the red version has an error. Study these and figure out the rule these illustrate.

Pair 5
• Hector opened his biology book and started to study.
• Hector opened his biology book, and started to study.

Pair 6
• Tyesha opened the door and let a strange cat into the house.
• Tyesha opened the door, and let a strange cat into the house.

Pair 7
• Oklahoma is a great place to work and to raise children.
• Oklahoma is a great place to work, and to raise children.

Pair 8
• My mother has worked hard all her life but has not gotten ahead as a result.
• My mother has worked hard all her life, but has not gotten ahead as a result.

Activity 44: Punctuating Introductory Elements

What can you figure out about punctuation rules from the following sentences? The sentences in black are correct; the sentences in red are not correct.

Pair 1
• Running after the bus, Jamey sprained his ankle.
• Running after the bus Jamey sprained his ankle.

Pair 2
• In the third drawer from the top of the dresser, I found my iPhone.
• In the third drawer from the top of the dresser I found my iPhone.

Pair 3
• To open a bank account, Susan had to fill out more than a dozen forms.
• To open a bank account Susan had to fill out more than a dozen forms.

What can you figure out about punctuation rules from the following sentences? The sentences in black are correct; the sentences in red are not correct.

Pair 4
• When I graduate will be a time for celebrating.
• When I graduate, will be a time for celebrating.

Pair 5
• Being unemployed can produce much anxiety.
• Being unemployed, can produce much anxiety.

Pair 6
• To let the dog out without a leash was a big mistake.
• To let the dog out without a leash, was a big mistake.

Activity 51: Editing for Punctuation
Using papers from Activity 49, students, working in groups, will edit for punctuation errors.

Activities to Accompany Sample Syllabus
The Reading/Writing Project on Truth
Reading Instruction

Activity 8: Reading is Thinking

Watch the video “Reading is Thinking.”

Activity 11: Previewing “The Problem with Facts”

Working in your group, preview the essay “The Problem with Facts,” which you can find as Activity 11. Take a quick look at the following parts of the essay:

- The title.
- The opening paragraph.
- The final paragraph.
- Any identifying information about the author.

Then, answer the following questions based on your previewing:

- What seems to be the main topic this essay is about?
- What did you learn from the opening paragraph?
- Who is the author?
- Did you notice anything that might make this essay a challenge to understand?
- How up-to-date is this essay?

Activity 17: Annotating “The Problem with Facts”

Students print out the essay “The Problem with Facts” and annotate it.

Activity 19: Discussing Annotation

Class discussion of several students’ annotation (Activity 17) of “The Problem with Facts” (Activity 13).

Activity 24: Activating Schema

Students are asked to listen as the instructor reads the following passage out loud and to raise their hands at any point when they feel confused.

The Community College Composition Contest

Compositions had been arriving in the mail for two weeks. By Friday more than fifty had had been logged in, and another twenty-five or so arrived in the Saturday mail. Over the weekend, the judges had to evaluate more than seventy-five compositions submitted from all over the country. By Sunday evening their eyes were aching, but they had finished. Some of the compositions made them hum; others caused them to tap their feet. A few caused the judges to wave their hands in the air as if directing an orchestra. At midnight on Sunday, they announced the three finalists. Monday evening the orchestra performed the three compositions to a large crowd.

Students are then asked if it would have helped if the title had been “The Community College Symphonic Composition Contest.” The discussion that follows should help students understand the importance of activating the right schema before reading.

Activity 38: Notetaking “How to Spot Fake News”
The article “How to Spot Fake News” (Activity 37) gives lots of advice about how to identify fake news. For this activity, you will make some notes about that article. As you read, simply jot down a list—in your own words—of the different strategies Kiely and Robertson suggest.

Activity 22: Summarizing “A Short History of Truth”

You probably have a sense of what it means to write a summary. You write something short that summarizes the main content of something longer that you have read.

For this assignment, we want you to try your hand at summary writing. After you’ve read the excerpt from A Short History of Truth (Activity 18) and perhaps made some notes, write a short paper—a half page would be plenty—in which you summarize the text.

Activity 23: Analyzing Summaries

Your group’s task is to read over the set of summaries your class wrote for Activity 20 and make two lists: one of what you found that worked well in one or more of the summaries and one of what weaknesses or mistakes you found in one or more of the summaries.

Activity 47: Researching Truth (Class Discussion)

Think of an issue you would like to know the truth about, an issue like one of the following:

* whether we’re winning the war in Afghanistan
* whether drug companies overcharge
* whether immigrants increase the amount of crime in America
* whether universal health insurance in England results in long wait lists
* whether coffee is harmful to your health
* whether organic foods are beneficial to your health
* whether the murder rate in America has increased in the past ten years
* whether environmental rules are killing the coal industry
* any other topic you would like to know the truth about

Do some investigation to find out what the truth is about the topic you have chosen. Then write a short paper, a page would be plenty, in which you describe how you went about learning the truth. Note that you are not being asked to argue your position on the issue, but rather to explain how you decided what the truth is.

Where appropriate, discuss how the concepts you have been exploring in this unit helped you, concepts like “facts,” “opinion,” “fact checkers,” “experts,” “fake news,” and “tribal thinking.”

Activity 48: Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting

Activity 49: Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting Sullivan

Activity 50: Discussion of Papers from Activity 49
Activity 1: Getting to Know You

This activity is designed to help you get to know some of the other members of your class. Working with the members of your group, figure out the answer to each of the following questions.

1. In the group, who was born in the most interesting place? Where?
2. In the group, who has the most interesting nickname? What is it?
3. In the group, who has the worst boss? What’s so terrible about his or her boss?
4. In the group, who is the best cook? What is his or her best dish?
5. In the group, who speaks the most languages? What are they?

Be prepared to share your group’s answers with the rest of the class.

Activity 3: Interesting Interviews

After the class is organized into pairs, you and your partner will interview each other with the goal of discovering something interesting—an unusual fact, an interesting experience, or a surprising attitude of the partner. After a few minutes, these will be presented to the class.

Activity 9: Why Are You in This Class?

For this short writing assignment, write a list of the reasons why, at this point in your life, you find yourself in a developmental writing class. This list doesn’t have to be long; it could even be just one or two reasons. I just want you to do a little thinking about why you are in this class.

Activity 10: Thinking About Why You Are in This Class

In your group, study the list of reasons the class gave in response to the question “at this point in your life, why do you find yourself in a class of developmental writing.” What do you notice about the list?

After some discussion of the list, again working with your group, study the following chart. Working in groups, what can you learn from this chart about why you are in a developmental writing class:

![Chart](chart.png)
Finally, again working in groups, come up with a list of observations from your life that would explain the conclusion you reached about the chart. In your life prior to enrolling in this class, what can you remember that would have contributed to the conclusion you reached?

Activity 16: College Material

Many students arrive in college with insecurities, doubts about whether they belong, doubts about whether they can succeed. In some cases, they express these doubts by saying something like this: “I’m just not sure I’m ‘college material.’”

For this assignment, write a short essay, about a page, in which you discuss this term “college material.” You don’t have to answer all these questions or any of them, but they’re here to help you think about the term.

1. What does “college material” mean?
2. Where do you suppose that students who wonder about whether they are “college material” learned the term? Who told them there was such a thing as students who are not “college material”?
3. Are you sure you are “college material”? If so, how did you avoid the doubt that comes from wondering whether you are?
4. Do you think anyone is not “college material”? What would put someone into that category? What keeps someone from being “college material”?
5. Do you know anyone who has these kinds of doubts about themselves? Are they “college material,” in your opinion? Why do they have these doubts about whether they belong in college?

Activity 18: Deconstructing “College Material”

Working in your group, discuss the concept of being “college material”—what it means, why it is or isn’t important. Where it comes from. Finally, who is “college material”? Do people get the idea they may not be “college material” in high school or does that doubt occur once they get to college?

Activity 30: College Terminology

Colleges and universities have a language of their own. Sometimes students new to college run into difficulty because of terms they don’t know. The following is a list of such terms.

Your instructor will divide this list up among several groups. Each group is responsible for writing a paragraph explaining each of the terms it is assigned. These paragraphs will be compiled into a document to be given out to students, so the audience for the writing is next year’s new college students. Write your paragraphs in “student friendly” style.

Try to use the knowledge of the group to define the terms, but if you need to, it’s okay to Google a term, but then translate the definition into “student friendly” language.

syllabus program plagiarism
withdrawal school FAFSA
bursar department incomplete
office hours dean books on reserve
registration appeal probation
transfer GPA
major incomplete

Activity 40: Plan B

About a month into the semester, I ask my students about stress. I ask whether the amount of stress they are feeling—from this course, from all their courses, from everything at the college, from their jobs, from their families, from other responsibilities they have—is the stress they are feeling about what they expected, more than they expected, or less than they expected.

While I’ve had a few students respond that it is about what they expected, I’ve never had a student say the stress is less than they expected. For the great preponderance of my students, the stress of going to college is greater than they had anticipated.

Then I describe the most common strategy for dealing with that stress: most students just bear down a little harder, sleep a little less, keep grinding away as best than can, and hope they can make it to the end of the semester. And this is not a bad
strategy. I’ve seen it work for hundreds of students, but I’ve also seen it fail for many students. They just keep grinding away until one day, their gears simply seize up, and they grind to a halt and drop out of school.

So I ask my students, working in groups, to think about strategies they might use, if and when they feel the stress reaching that critical point. What might they change to reduce the stress their feeling so they can survive to the end of the semester. What is their Plan B.

And they come up with lots of ideas. Here is a sampling:

- drop my math course
- take in a roommate to help with the rent
- cut back my hours at work
- I give up dating
- look for a job that pays better
- give up Grand Theft Auto
- look for a job I can do from home
- move back in with my parents
- get married
- give up watching the Ravens