

Think Before You Trust It

Four prompts, a five-point checklist, and what to do if it's already too late

The internet is not going to slow down and start being more careful with you. So this handout is about you slowing down instead. Each prompt below is something you can copy, paste into any AI chatbot, and use the same day. Keep this page. Tape the checklist near your phone.

Prompt 1: The Fact-Checker

Use this on any article, forwarded post, or headline that feels designed to alarm you.

This is the one we demonstrated in class.

Copy and paste everything below into your AI assistant:

You are an expert fact-checker and research assistant.

Analyze the article below and evaluate its factual accuracy.

For every factual claim:

1. Identify the claim as a standalone statement.
2. Classify it as one of the following:
 - Supported by reliable evidence
 - Partially supported or missing important context
 - Unsupported or likely false
 - Cannot be verified with available evidence
3. Explain your reasoning in 2-4 sentences.
4. If the claim is misleading, explain what context is missing.
5. If the claim is incorrect, provide a corrected version.

After reviewing all claims, provide:

Overall Assessment

- Overall factual reliability (High / Moderate / Low)
- Number of supported, partially supported, unsupported, and unverifiable claims
- Any patterns of bias, selective reporting, exaggeration, or misuse of evidence

- Whether the article accurately represents its cited sources
- Any important omissions that materially affect the reader's understanding

Output Format

Create a table with the columns: Claim, Rating, Explanation, Corrected Version (if needed)

Finish with a concise summary (200 words or fewer) describing how trustworthy

the article is and what readers should know before relying on it.

Important guidelines:

- Distinguish facts from opinions, predictions, and value judgments.
- Do not assume a claim is true because it is widely repeated.
- When evidence is mixed, describe the disagreement rather than forcing a conclusion.
- If evidence has changed over time, use the most current, authoritative information available.
- Clearly indicate when a claim cannot be verified instead of speculating.

Article to analyze:

[LINK TO SOURCE or PASTE CONTENT]

Prompt 2: Is This a Scam?

Use this the moment a text, email, or phone call gives you that uneasy feeling. Paste in what was said, and let the AI walk through it calmly while you're still deciding.

Copy and paste everything below into your AI assistant:

You are a scam-detection assistant helping someone evaluate a suspicious message.

I'm going to paste a text message, email, or a description of a phone call below.

Please:

1. Identify any red flags: urgency, secrecy, requests for money, gift cards,
wire transfers, or cryptocurrency, mismatched sender information,
emotional pressure, or unusual requests.
2. Rate the overall risk level: Low / Moderate / High.
3. Explain your reasoning in plain language, no jargon.
4. Suggest a safe next step: who to call, what to verify, or what to ignore.

Message or call to review:

[PASTE MESSAGE, OR DESCRIBE WHAT WAS SAID, HERE]

Prompt 3: Build My Family Verification Plan

Voice cloning takes three seconds of audio now. This prompt helps you set up the safeguard we talked about in class, a family phrase, before you ever need it.

Copy and paste everything below into your AI assistant:

I want to set up a simple safety plan with my family to protect against

AI voice-cloning and impersonation scams.

Please help me:

1. Suggest 3-4 example verification phrases we could choose from
(not common phrases, and nothing tied to information about us
that could be found online).
2. Write a short, friendly script I could use to explain this plan
to my
kids or grandkids without alarming them.
3. Suggest one simple habit our family could adopt for any call
involving
money or a claimed emergency.

Keep the tone warm and practical, not fearful.

Prompt 4: What's Missing From This Headline?

Use this when a headline is doing more work than the story underneath it. This is the pothole-versus-street-photo idea from class, turned into something you can run yourself.

Copy and paste everything below into your AI assistant:

You are a media literacy coach.

I'm going to give you a headline and a short excerpt from an article.

Please help me think critically about it:

1. What claim is the headline making?
2. What context might be missing that would change how I understand the story?
3. Who might benefit from this framing, and why?
4. What would someone who disagrees with this framing likely argue?
5. Is this describing an isolated event or a broader trend? What evidence would I need to tell the difference?

Headline and excerpt:

[PASTE HEADLINE AND ARTICLE EXCERPT HERE]

Five Things That Mean Stop

You don't need AI for this part. This is a gut-check list. If any one of these shows up, stop, hang up, and verify before you do anything else.

- Urgency — “you must act right now or something bad happens.”
- Secrecy — “don’t tell your spouse, your family, or your bank.”
- Untraceable payment — gift cards, wire transfers, cryptocurrency, cash by mail.
- A familiar voice or face asking for something it’s never asked for before.
- The rushed feeling itself — that feeling is the warning, not a reason to hurry.

If You Already Sent Money

No shame in it. These scams are professionally engineered by people who do this all day. Move fast and use these three calls, in this order.

- Call your bank or card company immediately and ask them to reverse or freeze the transaction.
- Report it at reportfraud.ftc.gov, and separately to the gift card issuer or wire service if one was used.
- File a report with your local police. It helps investigators connect the pattern, even when one case alone can’t be recovered.

With gratitude for six weeks together — Tom & Angela Hathaway, AIforUs50+