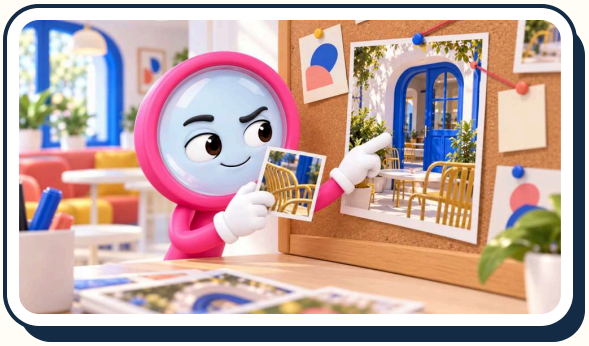
Case 20: Can the crew post this image as true?

A realistic image says the campus courtyard flooded today, and Jordy must decide what the six o'clock recap can say about it.

On your own Read What happened and underline the caption's claim. About 4 minutes.



Lupa holds a cropped photo of a courtyard next to the full photo pinned on a board. The full photo also shows a blue doorway.

Your role: You're the one who writes the verification note Jordy posts at six. **New skill:** Confirm an image with independent sources.

What happened

It is Wednesday, 3:10 p.m. For twenty minutes, an image has been going around the group chat. It looks like a photo of the campus courtyard, with water over the paving and benches. The caption says, "Courtyard flooded today, stay away." It showed up at 2:48 p.m. with no link, no date and no name.

Jordy is putting together the crew's recap, which goes out at six. Sami has zoomed in on a hand in the picture, and the fingers seem to merge at the knuckles. Someone ran the image through a free online detector. It reported "12% likely AI-generated."

A reply in the chat says the writer's roommate's friend saw water near the library. Jordy checks the campus facilities alerts page. It shows no active alerts, but its last update was Monday morning.

Your question: Did the courtyard flood today, and what should the recap say about the image?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example, then write your first guess in the box. About 4 minutes.

Provenance Provenance is information about where an image or a document came from and how it has been handled.

En español: procedencia

In this case: The courtyard image arrived at 2:48 p.m. with no link, no date and no named poster. Its provenance is unknown.

Corroboration Corroboration is support for a claim from an independent source.

En español: corroboración

In this case: A campus alert or someone's dated photo of the courtyard could corroborate the flood. A roommate's friend's report of water near the library cannot.

Verification note A verification note is a short record of what you checked, what you found and what is still unknown.

En español: nota de verificación

In this case: Instead of posting the image, the recap says what the crew checked, what it found and what is still unknown.

Who is involved

Sami

Checking where the image came from

"Everyone's zooming in on the hand. I did too, and it's weird. But I still don't know who posted this."

Jordy

Putting the six o'clock recap together

"The recap goes out at six. Right now I have an image with no source, a strange hand and an alerts page that hasn't updated since Monday."

Your first guess

Before you look at the evidence, do you think the courtyard flooded today?

My first guess is ___, because ___.

Notes

Reading passage

Verification under deadline

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Provenance**: Provenance is information about where an image or a document came from and how it has been handled.
- **Corroboration**: Corroboration is support for a claim from an independent source.
- **Verification note**: A verification note is a short record of what you checked, what you found and what is still unknown.
- **Claim**: A claim is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence.
- **Holding statement**: A holding statement is a short update that says what is known, what is still being checked and when people will hear more.
- **Correction**: A correction is a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information.

The story: Four clues and no source

The casebook closes where it opened, with a piece of media in a group chat and a group deciding what to tell people. At 2:48 p.m. on a Wednesday, an image of the campus courtyard under water appears with the caption “Courtyard flooded today, stay away.” It carries no link, no date and no original poster. Jordy has until six to decide what the crew’s recap will say.

By 3:10, four signals have accumulated. Sami’s zoom shows a hand whose fingers seem to merge at the knuckles. A free detector reports “12% likely AI-generated.” A secondhand message says someone’s roommate’s friend saw water near the library. The campus facilities alerts page shows no active alerts, with a last update on Monday at 9:15 a.m.

The case is designed so that none of these signals resolves the question, and several tempt overinterpretation. Sami models the necessary shift. She acknowledges the anomaly she found and then sets it aside in favor of provenance. Who posted the image first, and when? Jordy models the editorial decision. Wanting a clean answer is not a reason to publish one. The recap will say what was checked and leave the image out.

Your role is to write the verification note Jordy posts at six.

Stop and think. How does the absence of provenance change what the other clues can prove?

An evidentiary standard for images

Provenance is information about where an image or a document came from and how it has been handled. For images that claim to show a news event, provenance is the primary question, and it applies the Case 1 skill of finding the original source. Its absence here shifts the burden to corroboration.

The caption asserts a **claim**, a statement that something is true that can be checked with evidence. The available signals differ in kind. The hand anomaly is diagnostic of nothing on its own, since generated images can look natural and genuine photos can look odd. The detector's output lacks the error rates that would make it interpretable, and it addresses whether the image is synthetic rather than whether the event occurred. The secondhand report is attenuated in source and mismatched in location.

Corroboration is support for a claim from an independent source. The official source, Case 9's habit, is the alerts page, and its staleness means its silence is weak evidence. An independent, dated image or a same-day official notice would be probative.

The case's new skill is confirming an image with independent sources and publishing only what was verified. The chosen output is a **verification note**, a short record of what you checked, what you found and what is still unknown. It is the structural descendant of Case 1's **holding statement**, which says what is known, what is still being checked and when people will hear more. It commits the crew to Case 3's duty of **correction**, a public statement that replaces wrong information with accurate information, if later evidence changes the picture. Jordy's refusal to post the image "with a question mark" reflects a practical insight. Hedging language does not travel with an image, and the image is what spreads.

Stop and think. Why does hedging language fail to travel with an image?

Technical limits and professional norms

NIST's overview of synthetic-content transparency surveys provenance metadata, labeling, watermarking and detection, and it emphasizes that each has technical limits (NIST, November 20, 2024). Perception offers no backstop. Nightingale and Farid found that people could not reliably distinguish AI-synthesized faces from real ones and rated synthetic faces as more trustworthy (PNAS, February 14, 2022).

Recent cases show the costs of skipping provenance.

Technical limits and professional norms, continued

The Hurricane Helene "girl and puppy" image had no identifiable photographer or outlet, and forensic analysis found inconsistencies such as a boat floor with impossible perspective (UC Berkeley School of Information, October 4, 2024). Local reporting documented how emotion outran verification (KPRC Click2Houston, October 9, 2024). In 2023, a fabricated image of an explosion near the Pentagon spread through verified accounts and briefly moved markets (NPR, May 22, 2023; CNN, May 22, 2023). Critics now warn that AI content is spreading confusion across feeds (PBS NewsHour, October 22, 2025).

Professional codes treat verification and transparency about uncertainty as obligations. RTDNA says journalism "acknowledges the absence of important additional information" (RTDNA Code of Ethics, June 11, 2015). SPJ holds that the public "is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources" (SPJ Code of Ethics, September 6, 2014). PRSA asks practitioners to "investigate the truthfulness and accuracy of information released on behalf of those represented" (PRSA Code of Ethics, October 2000). A verification note meets all three standards, even when its conclusion is "we cannot confirm this yet."

Stop and think. Across twenty cases, which earlier skill mattered most in this one, and why?

Sources

Real source | National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) | November 20, 2024
Reducing Risks Posed by Synthetic Content: An Overview of Technical Approaches to Digital Content Transparency

Real source | PNAS (Nightingale & Farid) | February 14, 2022
AI-synthesized faces are indistinguishable from real faces and more trustworthy

Real source | UC Berkeley School of Information | October 4, 2024
Hany Farid breaks down the viral Helene image

Real source | KPRC Click2Houston | October 9, 2024
Houstonians learn the cons of a viral AI-generated photo after Hurricane Helene

Real source | NPR | May 22, 2023
Fake viral images of an explosion at the Pentagon were probably created by AI

Real source | CNN | May 22, 2023
'Verified' Twitter accounts share fake image of 'explosion' near Pentagon, causing confusion

Real source | PBS NewsHour | October 22, 2025
AI content spreads confusion and misinformation, critics say

Sources, continued

Real source | Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) | 2015

RTDNA Code of Ethics

Real source | Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) | 2014

SPJ Code of Ethics

Real source | Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) | 2000

PRSA Code of Ethics

Notes

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document and write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 7 minutes.

Evidence A | **Group-chat post**

The courtyard image and its caption

Image, described: a photo-like view of the campus courtyard with water over the paving and benches. A person in the foreground holds up a phone. Caption: “Courtyard flooded today, stay away.” Shared Wednesday at 2:48 p.m. with no link, no date on the image and no original poster named.

Look closely: Underline what the caption claims. Circle what the post is missing.

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | **Screenshot**

Sami’s zoom-in on the hand

Zoomed screenshot of the foreground hand: the fingers seem to merge at the knuckles. Sami posted it in the crew chat on Wednesday at 3:02 p.m.

Look closely: What does the odd hand tell you? What can it not tell you?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | **Detector result**

A score from a free online detector

"12% likely AI-generated."

Look closely: What did the tool measure? Does it say anything about the flood?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence D | **Web page**

The campus facilities alerts page, checked at 3:10 p.m.

"No active alerts. Last update: Monday, 9:15 a.m. Scheduled elevator maintenance in Science Hall, completed."

Look closely: When was this page last updated? Compare that with the caption's claim.

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Key idea: provenance

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

Provenance is information about where an image or a document came from and how it has been handled. Check it first when an image claims to show a news event. An image can look polished and still be generated, edited, old or shared with the wrong caption. The courtyard image arrived with no link, no date and no named poster, so its provenance is unknown.

A detail or a tool can give a clue, but it cannot settle the question. An odd-looking hand is a reason to look closer. A natural-looking hand does not prove that an image is real, either. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) describes several ways to track, label, watermark and detect synthetic content, such as AI-generated images. NIST explains that each approach has technical limits.

For a claim about a real event, look for the earliest post, its date and place, and corroboration. **Corroboration** is support for a claim from an independent source. Here, that could be a campus alert or someone's dated photo of the courtyard. If you cannot confirm the claim, write a verification note. A **verification note** is a short record of what you checked, what you found and what is still unknown.

Professional standards

Real source | **Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)**

RTDNA Code of Ethics: Truth and accuracy above all

"Journalism verifies, provides relevant context, tells the rest of the story and acknowledges the absence of important additional information."

In plain words: The RTDNA code asks news staff to say what they checked and to admit what they still do not know.

Question: The facilities page shows no active alerts but was last updated Monday. What should Jordy's note say is still unknown?

Your answer

Still unknown: ___, because ___.

In the news

Real source | NPR | May 22, 2023

Fake viral images of an explosion at the Pentagon were probably created by AI

A realistic fake image spread fast and briefly moved markets before officials confirmed nothing happened.

Real source | CNN | May 22, 2023

'Verified' Twitter accounts share fake image of 'explosion' near Pentagon, causing confusion

A blue check was not proof: accounts that looked trustworthy still shared an image with no real source.

Notes

Sort the evidence

On your own Sort each piece of evidence under the claim it bears on and fill in each box. About 6 minutes.

Two claims are in play: the flood and the image. Sort each piece of evidence under the claim it actually bears on. What would settle either one?

Evidence	**Claim 1** The courtyard flooded today.	**Claim 2** The image was generated by AI.
1 The image shows water in a courtyard, with no date or source		
2 Facilities alerts page at 3:10 p.m.: no active alerts		
3 Secondhand report of water near the library		
4 An odd hand and a 12% detector score		

Still open

- The image's earliest source and date

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is ___. I would ask ___.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what Jordy should do, explain why and fix the two marked phrases. About 5 minutes.

The recap goes out at six. What should Jordy do about the courtyard image?

- ☐ **A** Post the image with a question: “Is the courtyard flooded?”
- ☐ **B** Say the image is fake, because the hand looks wrong.
- ☐ **C** Leave the image out, report what the crew checked and say the flood is not confirmed.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student’s first draft

Heads up everyone!! ❶ The courtyard flooded today so don’t go over there. Some people are saying the picture is AI because the hand looks weird but I ran it through a detector and it said 12% AI so it’s basically real. My roommate also said her friend saw water near the library earlier, so that pretty much confirms it. Stay safe and ❷ tell your friends, we don’t want anyone getting hurt or ruining their shoes lol. We’ll post more if we hear anything else about it.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Write the verification note the crew posts instead of the image. Then write a memo recommending two changes to the campus facilities alerts page that would help students check rumors.

Use: Case documents: the courtyard image and caption, Sami's zoom-in, the secondhand reply, the detector result and the campus facilities alerts page. Real sources: NIST's overview of synthetic content and the News Literacy Project's RumorGuard check, a model verification note.

You'll make: Verification note, 50—80 words, plus a memo of 250—350 words

Time: 75 minutes

1. Fill in the chain chart for the courtyard image: claim, earliest source, date, corroboration.
2. Write the verification note, 50 to 80 words, on the Your draft page.
3. List what the alerts page could not tell the crew on Wednesday.
4. Plan two changes the office that runs the page could make.
5. Draft the memo's recommendations on the Your draft page.
6. Finish the memo, 250 to 350 words, on lined paper or in the online workspace.

Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Chain chart

Your task, continued

What the alerts page could not tell the crew

Two questions, and who can answer each

Notes

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 25 minutes.

Verification note, 50 to 80 words

Memo: the two recommendations

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions, mark your level in each rubric row and write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your note say what was checked and what is still open?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Do you treat the 12% score and the odd hand as clues, not proof?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does your memo note the Monday 9:15 a.m. update?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Could the office make both changes you recommend?	☐ Yes	☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ Treats the image as proof.	☐ Cites a detector or a detail as a verdict.	☐ Checks the earliest source and an independent record.	☐ Checks several sources and names what each can't show.
Reasoning	☐ Declares real or fake with no basis.	☐ Hedges without explaining why.	☐ Matches confidence to evidence.	☐ Separates authenticity of the file from truth of the event.
Audience & purpose	☐ Urges spreading.	☐ Warns without guidance.	☐ Gives followers a safe next step.	☐ Gives a next step, a follow-up time and a way to contribute evidence.

How your work is scored, continued

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Softens words only.	☐ Replaces the verdict with a verification note.	☐ Explains how each change protects followers and credibility.

One change I made after feedback

I changed ___ because ___.

Notes

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete the sentence frames. About 10 minutes.

1 **What would you need beyond the image to support the caption's claim?**

2 **Do you agree with Jordy's choice to leave the image out of the recap, and why?**

3 **Who could be harmed if the crew called a real photo fake?**

4 **The alerts page shows nothing new since Monday. Does that prove the courtyard did not flood?**

My take

My claim: ___.

My take, continued

The best evidence is ___, because ___.

Someone who disagrees might say ___.

The limit of the evidence is ___.

I would change my mind if ___.

Notes

Talk about this case at home

Case 20: Can the crew post this image as true?

In this case, a realistic image in a group chat claims that a campus courtyard flooded today. Your student checked where the image came from and wrote a short note that says what is known and what is not.

Questions to talk about

1. What would you check before you share a picture of breaking news?
2. Where does your town or school post official alerts?
3. Why can saying you are not sure yet be better than guessing?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.

See the case online.