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 5 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

Checked, found, still unknown

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: An image with no when or where

At 2:48 p.m. on a Wednesday, an image lands in the group chat with no link, no date and no name attached. It looks like a photo of the campus courtyard, with water covering the paving and the benches. The caption is urgent: “Courtyard flooded today, stay away.” By 3:10, it has been circulating for twenty minutes.

Jordy has a deadline. The crew’s recap goes out at six, and the first question in the chat is whether the courtyard picture goes in. The evidence piles up quickly, and none of it settles anything. Sami, who studies design and photographs things most people walk past, zooms in on a hand in the foreground. The fingers seem to merge at the knuckles. Someone runs the image through a free detector and gets “12% likely AI-generated.” A reply says the writer’s roommate’s friend saw water near the library. Jordy checks the campus facilities alerts page. It lists no active alerts, but it has not been updated since Monday at 9:15 a.m.

Sami redirects the conversation. Everyone is zooming in on the hand, and she did too. But she still does not know who posted the image. When she takes a photo, it has a when and a where. This one has neither.

Your role is to write the verification note Jordy posts at six. It is the final skill in the casebook, and it combines many of the others.

Stop and think. Sami shifts the question from how the image looks to where it came from. Why is that the stronger question?

From clues to a verification note

Start where Case 1 started, with the original source. **Provenance** is information about where an image or a document came from and how it has been handled. This image arrived without any, so its provenance is unknown.

The caption makes a **claim**, the Case 1 term for a statement that something is true that you can check with evidence. Look at each clue honestly. The hand is a reason to look closer, not proof of anything. A natural-looking hand would not prove an image is real, either. The detector score is a number without context. Sami asks, twelve percent of what? These tools can be wrong in both directions, and none of them can say whether the courtyard flooded today. The secondhand report fails as a source twice. It is a roommate's friend, and it is about the library, not the courtyard. Jordy would welcome it if that person had a photo with a time on it.

Corroboration is support for a claim from an independent source. The best candidates are an official alert or a dated photo from someone on site. Case 9 taught you to check the official source for your area, and the alerts page is that source. Its silence is weak evidence, because it has not been updated since Monday.

Jordy considers posting the image with a question mark and rejects it, because a question mark still spreads the picture. Instead, the recap will carry a **verification note**, a short record of what you checked, what you found and what is still unknown. It shares its logic with Case 1's **holding statement**, which says what is known, what is still being checked and when people will hear more. Case 3 adds the last piece. If new evidence changes the answer, a **correction** goes where people saw the original note.

Stop and think. The alerts page shows nothing new since Monday. Does that prove the courtyard did not flood?

How real newsrooms handle it

After Hurricane Helene in October 2024, an image of a crying girl clutching a puppy in a rescue boat spread widely. Fact-checkers found no original photographer or news source. Digital-forensics researcher Hany Farid pointed to details that did not hold together, like a boat floor with impossible perspective (UC Berkeley School of Information, October 4, 2024). In 2023, fake images of an explosion near the Pentagon spread quickly and briefly moved markets before officials confirmed nothing had happened (NPR, May 22, 2023).

Looking closely is not enough. Research found that people could not reliably tell AI-generated faces from real ones (Nightingale and Farid, PNAS, February 14, 2022).

Stop and think. Do you agree with Jordy's choice to leave the image out of the recap? Why or why not?

Sources

Real source | UC Berkeley School of Information | October 4, 2024

Hany Farid breaks down the viral Helene image

Real source | NPR | May 22, 2023

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

Real source | PNAS (Nightingale & Farid) | February 14, 2022

AI-synthesized faces are indistinguishable from real faces and more trustworthy

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 7 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

The note should say ___ is still unknown.

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 6 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

Grades 9—10

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 6 minutes.

Write the verification note Jordy posts instead of the image, plus a one-paragraph explanation of your choices.

Use: All case materials and the NIST summary.

You'll make: Note (50—80 words) plus 120-word rationale

Time: 50 minutes

1. Write the caption's claim in one sentence in the planner.
2. List what the crew checked, using Evidence A to D.
3. Mark each piece of evidence as supporting, challenging or leaving open the flood claim.
4. Write a verification note of 50 to 80 words on the Your draft page.
5. Say what the crew checked, what it found, what is still unknown and when it will update.
6. Explain your choices in a rationale of about 120 words.

Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

The caption's claim

What the crew checked, and what each check shows

Your task, continued

Supports, challenges or leaves open

Notes

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 18 minutes.

Verification note, 50 to 80 words

We've seen ___. We checked ___.

Rationale, about 120 words

I chose ___ because ___.

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 6 minutes.

Does your note say what the crew checked?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it avoid a verdict the evidence cannot support?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does it give followers a next step?	☐ Yes	☐ No
Does your rationale explain your hedging choices?	☐ 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 8 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 ___.

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.