THE WHY FILES

Student reader

Follow twenty everyday situations through the evidence, the institution, and the question that still needs answering.

20 cases / 5 units

The Why Files · Case Notes · The Receipts · Save This · Make It · What Changed? · Behind the Case

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How to read a case

Begin with what you think is happening. Open the matching source set in The Receipts. Use Case Notes to record what the records change. The stories and practice documents are original fictional situations; external connections are labeled separately.

You do not need to agree with a rule to describe it accurately. You do not need to be certain about everything to identify a useful next question.

01 The transcript says more than the GPA

UNIT 1 / Before you run with it

The question underneath: transcripts and records

A senior opens a screenshot showing a 3.42 GPA and treats the number like an admissions verdict. Comparing it with other numbers online seems easy. But the screenshot compresses several years into one figure. The transcript records changes that the average cannot show alone.

Source A shows an upward grade trend, advanced courses during junior and senior year, and one repeated course. Those details invite different questions. What improved over time? Which classes became more demanding? How is the repeated course recorded? None of the receipts explains why the course was repeated, so that part of the student's experience remains unknown.

Source B adds the school's context: six AP courses are offered, AP and Honors classes receive GPA weighting, and class rank is not reported. A student cannot take an unlimited menu of advanced courses that the school does not offer. The profile also warns against treating this GPA as automatically comparable with a number calculated under another school's rules.

Source C considers rigor, performance over time and available opportunities. It promises no admission cutoff. The senior can write a contextual academic summary, but cannot calculate an admission outcome. Next, check the transcript for accuracy and seek clarification instead of deciding that one number means certain rejection or acceptance.

Words in the case

Transcript

A school-issued record of courses, grades and related academic information.

Weighted GPA

A grade average calculated with additional weight for designated courses.

School profile

A document describing a school's curriculum, opportunities and reporting practices.

Read the evidence

Source A is closest to the student's recorded coursework. Source B explains conditions under which that record was produced, including weighting and course availability. Together they support a contextual reading. They do not establish an exact recalculated GPA, because the excerpt does not supply individual grades, credits or a full calculation rule.

Source C describes this fictional college's stated review approach. It supports discussing trends and opportunities, not assigning them admission points or promising how a reader will react. A counselor or registrar can clarify the school record; the college admissions office can clarify its own requirements. These are distinct questions for distinct offices.

Your next move

Explain what the GPA can and cannot establish. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

How would your interpretation change if the same grades came from a school with a different course menu and weighting system?

02 What can a recommendation letter actually do?

UNIT 1 / Before you run with it

The question underneath: recommendations and evidence

A student hopes a recommendation will repair an average grade. They consider asking the teacher to describe them as perfect. That request misses what the practice college wants: classroom contributions and context that the other materials do not explain. A useful recommendation can describe growth without pretending the grade was different.

Source A asks for one teacher recommendation. It identifies classroom performance, contributions and less visible context as the purpose. The best fit depends on what a teacher can observe and explain. A familiar teacher may be able to discuss revision or contribution that a course grade alone cannot communicate, without pretending the grade was different.

Source B is a brag sheet with coursework, a project, a job, responsibilities and questions. These are places to organize evidence, not instructions to manufacture a glowing story. The student should distinguish work the teacher saw from background supplied by the student. This helps the teacher decide what they can describe firsthand and what needs attribution or clarification.

Source C records a waiver selection and says the recommendation was received. It resolves a status question while leaving the contents unknown. A packet should provide requirements, deadlines, submission instructions and relevant reminders while preserving the teacher's judgment. Checking completion does not give the applicant control over the assessment or guarantee admission.

Words in the case

Firsthand observation

Information someone can describe from directly seeing or participating in an event.

Context

Relevant circumstances that help a reader interpret an experience or record.

Submission status

A system's record of where an item stands in a submission process.

Read the evidence

A establishes the recommender's assignment. B suggests supporting categories but supplies no verified accomplishment or actual anecdote. Label classroom examples separately from outside responsibilities. These receipts cannot support inventing a project result or job history.

Source C establishes status and a recorded waiver choice, not the wording, strength or confidentiality terms of a letter. Those terms must be read in the actual application instructions. The teacher controls what they write; the admissions office or application support team can clarify submission problems. Neither role turns receipt into admission assurance.

Your next move

Build a recommender packet that gives usable evidence without scripting praise. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

How would a recommendation packet for a job supervisor differ from one prepared for a classroom teacher?

03 “Test optional” does not mean the same thing everywhere

UNIT 1 / Before you run with it

The question underneath: admissions policy verification

A student labels colleges with short phrases in a notes app. Test optional seems to settle testing in two words. Then a scholarship page adds a score deadline, and a checklist says official results come later. The list mixes three questions: whether to submit, for what purpose and through which process.

Source A lets applicants to College A choose whether SAT or ACT scores are considered. It does not say that submitted scores are ignored, nor does it describe scholarship requirements. A careful comparison needs a separate field for each purpose. Leaving a field marked unknown is more useful than silently importing a rule from a different college.

Source B says College B's admission process is test optional, but some merit scholarships require scores by December 1. Both statements can be true. The exception concerns a specific use of scores. The page excerpt does not identify the scholarships, application year or time zone, so the student still needs the full current instructions before making an actual submission plan.

Source C describes self-reporting by a deadline and official scores after enrollment if scores are submitted. It does not show whether a particular score would help. Record separate rules and research dates. Also identify whose checklist C is: the excerpt does not safely attach its instructions to both colleges.

Words in the case

Test optional

A policy allowing applicants to choose score consideration for a specified process.

Self-report

Enter information yourself instead of initially submitting the issuing organization's official record.

Application cycle

The particular admission period to which requirements and deadlines apply.

Read the evidence

A answers whether College A considers an applicant's submitted scores. B separates admission from certain scholarships at College B. Their similar admission labels do not establish identical rules for every purpose. Neither receipt supplies test-free or test-required policies, so those labels from the opening scenario cannot be assigned to a named college here.

C supplies a submission sequence but leaves the applicable institution and exact deadline unspecified. A table should show that limit instead of inventing a date. The date checked records the student's research activity; it is different from the application deadline. Admissions and scholarship offices can clarify their respective rules and application cycles.

Your next move

Create a comparison table with date checked. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

Where else might an optional admission requirement become required for a separate benefit, placement process or program?

04 The aid offer is not the bill

UNIT 1 / Before you run with it

The question underneath: financial aid and net price

Source A looks generous when every line is added: $18,000 in grants, $5,500 in loan eligibility and $2,500 in work-study eligibility. The total is $26,000, but those dollars do not work alike. Treating them as money already available would hide important conditions.

The grants are the offer's gift-aid category. Loan eligibility describes borrowing that would need its own acceptance and processing. Work-study identifies a chance to earn wages through work, not an immediate credit equal to $2,500. Source C confirms that students must obtain a job and work to earn work-study wages. Eligibility and money already received are different stages.

Source B shows $31,000 in tuition and fees plus $12,000 for housing and meals. Those billed charges total $43,000. With $18,000 in pending grants, the estimate shows $25,000 before loans and other payments. It is a snapshot of the student account, not proof that every grant has posted or that the displayed balance includes every expense of attending.

The student needs two conversations. Financial aid can clarify award conditions, borrowing and work-study. Student accounts can explain posted charges, pending credits and payment timing. Books, travel and other possible expenses are not priced here. A useful translation therefore includes known arithmetic and questions that still affect the payment plan.

Words in the case

Gift aid

Aid such as grants that is generally not borrowed, subject to its conditions.

Pending credit

An expected account credit that has not yet finished posting.

Work-study

Aid eligibility linked to earning wages through an eligible job.

Read the evidence

A classifies offered or eligible aid. B records charges and pending credits. Subtracting the grants once reconciles their figures: $43,000 minus $18,000 equals $25,000. Deducting the same grants again would double-count them. A loan could change the account balance if accepted and credited, but would not convert that amount into gift aid.

C explains why work-study is not upfront cash. It establishes no job, wage rate or earnings date for this student. The receipts omit a complete attendance budget, renewal conditions and disbursement schedule, all relevant to planning payments.

Your next move

Translate the offer into grants, loans, work-study, billed costs, and unknowns. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

How would you compare two colleges if one offer highlights a large total that combines loans with grants?

05 My deposit is smaller than my hours times my rate

UNIT 2 / Read the fine print

The question underneath: gross/net pay and deductions

The first deposit is smaller than expected. Eighteen hours at sixteen dollars should equal $288. Source A confirms those hours and that rate. The worker's arithmetic is right, but it describes gross earnings. The deposit is net pay after the deductions shown on the statement.

Source B starts with the same $288 gross amount. It lists $34.21 in taxes and a $12 meal deduction, then reports $241.79 net. Those numbers reconcile: the deductions total $46.21. This rules out a mismatch between the displayed gross earnings and the displayed deposit, but it does not establish that every deduction was calculated or authorized correctly.

The meal line creates a specific question. The receipt does not say when the meal was provided, what agreement applies, or why twelve dollars was deducted. Guessing that every meal deduction is prohibited would go beyond the evidence. Assuming the deduction must be correct because payroll printed it would do the same. The worker can request an itemized explanation without deciding the answer in advance.

Source C names payroll as the contact and provides five business days for timecard corrections. That instruction should not become an invented deadline for every concern. Save the timecard and statement, ask promptly about the unexplained line, and record the response. A specific question makes the issue easier to investigate.

Words in the case

Gross pay

Earnings before the deductions shown on a pay statement.

Net pay

The amount remaining after the statement's deductions are applied.

Deduction

An amount subtracted from gross earnings for an identified purpose.

Read the evidence

A and B agree about gross earnings, so the known issue is not a missing displayed hour. B explains the numerical gap between gross and net. It does not verify the underlying tax calculation or meal authorization. Arithmetic consistency and proper payment are related checks, but passing one does not automatically establish the other.

C supplies an internal contact and a particular correction process. Its five-business-day instruction cannot establish any statutory deadline or waive rights not discussed in the receipt. A useful payroll message identifies the pay period from the actual statement, names the disputed line and asks what documentation supports it instead of accusing an unnamed person.

Your next move

Read the paycheck line by line and draft a payroll question. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

If the gross line showed fewer hours than the timecard, how would your first payroll question change?

06 Can my manager schedule me for that?

UNIT 2 / Read the fine print

The question underneath: youth employment rules and jurisdiction

A sixteen-year-old sees a school-night shift ending at 11:30 p.m. One coworker says all minors must stop earlier; another says sixteen ends every restriction. Both treat a broad statement as enough to settle this shift. The receipts show why the worker needs a more specific check.

Source A establishes the age and scheduled end time. It does not identify the state, job duties or workplace category. Source B says youth-work rules may depend on age, school day, occupation and state law. Without those facts, the class cannot turn a remembered rule from another job or state into a definitive answer here.

Source C adds another issue: the worker listed availability until 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday. The proposed shift ends two and a half hours later. The availability form establishes what the worker communicated, not whether the manager accepted an agreement or whether a statute was violated. The scheduling conversation and legal-information search should therefore run alongside each other.

DOL's nonagricultural guidance distinguishes sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds from younger workers: federal youth-employment hour limits do not apply the same way, while hazardous-work restrictions remain. State protections may be stricter. Identify the job and state, check official guidance, and separately ask the manager to address the documented availability.

Words in the case

Jurisdiction

The place or authority whose rules apply to a particular question.

Availability

The times a worker has communicated they can work.

Hazardous occupation

Work classified under applicable rules as posing specified dangers to young workers.

Read the evidence

A supports a concrete comparison with C: 11:30 p.m. is later than the stated 9 p.m. availability. It does not establish an accepted scheduling agreement. B explains which missing details are legally relevant but gives no state's actual cutoff. An answer that supplies a universal nine-o'clock rule would invent a legal fact absent from the receipts.

The separately verified federal reference, DOL Fact Sheet 43, concerns nonagricultural work and distinguishes hours from hazardous occupations. It does not settle an unspecified state's rules or this employee's duties. The model response should preserve that scope and direct the local check to the state labor agency, while taking the availability issue to the manager.

Your next move

Write what is known federally and what must be checked locally. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

What new facts would you need before applying your answer to a fifteen-year-old doing a different job?

07 What do I document before I report?

UNIT 2 / Read the fine print

The question underneath: harassment reporting pathways and documentation

A student worker receives repeated unwanted comments. The case provides no wording or finding about the conduct. It supplies a timeline structure, workplace policy and report confirmation. The task is to organize a usable record and identify reporting options without filling missing details with guesses.

Source A asks for dates, times, observed words or actions, location, witnesses and saved-message identifiers. A factual record can distinguish what the worker personally observed from what someone else reported. If exact wording is remembered, it should be marked accordingly; if it is a paraphrase, it should not be presented as a quotation. An unknown detail can remain unknown.

Source B names three internal reporting options: manager, human resources or a hotline. It also prohibits retaliation for good-faith reporting under the workplace policy. That policy statement matters, but it is not proof that no harmful response could occur. Nor does the excerpt establish every external legal protection, reporting deadline or confidentiality rule that might apply.

Source C confirms receipt on September 21 and assigns case 1842. It directs safety or schedule updates to HR. It does not say the concerns were substantiated, resolved or dismissed. Save it for follow-up. The worker can ask about support and next steps without waiting to assemble a perfect record.

Words in the case

Incident record

A dated account of relevant events, sources and remaining uncertainties.

Inference

An interpretation drawn from evidence rather than a directly observed fact.

Retaliation

A harmful response to reporting or other protected activity, defined by the applicable policy or law.

Read the evidence

A is a record-building tool, not an investigation outcome. Its strongest entries separate observation, attributed information and inference. A description of someone's words may support a question about conduct; it does not automatically establish the person's motive. The supplied template contains no actual incident details, so a model must not invent them.

B establishes the fictional employer's internal channels and policy. C establishes that a report was received, with a date and case number. Neither confirms what an investigation found. If a concern requires outside guidance, the relevant law, jurisdiction and agency process must be checked separately rather than inferred from the company's policy wording.

Your next move

Build a factual incident record and identify reporting channels. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

How would you document a concerning message when you know its content but cannot yet identify who sent it?

08 The internship says “for experience”

UNIT 2 / Read the fine print

The question underneath: internships and worker classification intro

A summer listing offers experience instead of pay. It requests twenty-five hours weekly, management of the company inbox and client reports. The student wants practical work for future applications, but the business also needs those tasks completed. The internship label cannot settle who primarily benefits.

Source A records the advertised duties, hours and unpaid status. Its preference for college credit may sound reassuring, yet the listing does not name a training sequence, educational supervisor or feedback plan. Those omissions do not establish that no training exists. They show what the student needs to ask about before accepting the description at face value.

Source B explains that credit is optional and requires faculty approval of learning objectives and supervision. The employer cannot award that credit merely by including the phrase in an advertisement. The student must also consider whether obtaining credit would involve registration, fees or scheduling commitments, none of which the practice agreement prices or explains.

Source C summarizes the flexible federal primary-beneficiary framework for for-profit employers. No single factor controls. Gather facts about training, education, hours, duration and paid staff's work. Affordability is another decision. An interesting position can still require questions about compensation, learning, transportation and the student's available time.

Words in the case

Primary beneficiary

The party who benefits primarily from an internship relationship under the relevant framework.

Learning objective

A specific skill or understanding an educational experience is designed to develop.

Supervision

Guidance and oversight, including feedback, provided during the work or learning.

Read the evidence

A supplies business duties and hours, not a legal classification. B describes a college's credit-approval process, not approval of this particular placement. Credit may be relevant to educational integration, but the phrase college credit preferred does not resolve employee status. Treating it as a complete legal answer would ignore the distinction between the two documents.

C supplies the general federal framework for for-profit employers, independently checked against DOL Fact Sheet 71. Its application depends on the actual relationship, not a checklist score or one persuasive phrase. Ask whether training complements paid employees' work or displaces it, and who supervises learning. The receipts do not establish the employer category or all relevant facts.

Your next move

Use factors to identify questions that need answers before accepting. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

What additional questions would matter if the same listing came from a nonprofit, school program or government agency?

09 Debit, credit, and “buy now” are not the same thing

UNIT 3 / Find who’s responsible

The question underneath: consumer finance basics

A student comparing laptop payment methods notices every option ends with a checkout button. Debit, credit and installments can look interchangeable. The receipts instead ask when money leaves, what remains owed and which conditions matter if a payment is missed. Receiving the item now does not answer those questions.

Source A describes a debit purchase as drawing generally from the checking balance. It also says overdraft settings and fees vary. That means the student must check the particular account's terms and available balance. The source does not establish that a debit purchase will always be declined when funds are low, or that an overdraft will always happen.

Source B lists the credit disclosure categories: APR, minimum payment, due date and late fee. It provides no numerical APR or fee. Those missing values prevent a meaningful total-cost calculation for carrying a balance. A minimum payment is a required payment amount under the account terms, not evidence that paying only that amount clears the entire purchase.

Source C advertises four $37.50 installments, totaling $150 for the example. The packet does not establish whether that is the full laptop price or a sample purchase. Open the linked missed-payment and collection terms before comparing obligations. Smaller installments do not remove the amount that remains owed.

Words in the case

APR

Annual percentage rate, a measure used to express a borrowing rate over a year.

Installment

One payment in a series used to meet a larger payment obligation.

Overdraft

A situation where account payments exceed the available balance under account rules.

Read the evidence

A identifies the account that funds debit spending. B identifies borrowing terms, but lacks the numbers required to compare interest and fees. C provides an installment sum and a route to additional conditions. Comparing only the prominently displayed payment would give C an artificial advantage while leaving the other products' terms unexamined.

The strongest comparison separates payment timing, available funds, interest or fees, and missed-payment consequences. Known details and unknown details belong in different cells. These receipts cannot identify a universally cheapest option, establish an approval decision or predict credit consequences. The bank, card issuer or installment provider's actual disclosures must supply the missing contract details.

Your next move

Compare timing, fees, risk, and what happens if payment is missed. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

How would your comparison change if the smallest installment came due before the student's next available funds?

10 The subscription kept charging

UNIT 3 / Find who’s responsible

The question underneath: subscriptions, scams, consumer protection

The student remembers an introductory price and is surprised by continuing charges. Source A actually specifies a paid first month at $4.99, followed by $14.99 monthly until cancellation. These are not free-trial or annual-plan terms. A complaint about a different offer would miss what the records establish.

Source B records charges on May 2, June 2 and July 2. It confirms a recurring pattern, but the excerpt does not supply each amount or a record of earlier cancellation attempts. The student cannot prove from this list alone that the provider charged the wrong price or ignored a cancellation. Those questions need additional records.

Source C confirms cancellation on July 4, continued access through August 1 and no further renewals. Access and renewal are separate states here. Continuing to use already available service after July 4 would not by itself show that cancellation failed. The confirmation is the clearest record of when cancellation took effect in the supplied packet.

Keep a dated evidence file. July 2 precedes the July 4 cancellation, so that earlier charge raises a separate refund question the confirmation cannot answer. Save terms, billing history and confirmation, monitor later renewals, and ask about a disputed charge using its date and amount.

Words in the case

Introductory price

A starting price that changes after the stated introductory period.

Renewal

Continuation of a subscription into another billing period under its terms.

Cancellation confirmation

A provider's record stating that a cancellation was received or processed.

Read the evidence

A establishes an introductory month followed by recurring monthly pricing. B verifies charge dates, not the amounts, the starting date of the promotion or any earlier cancellation attempt. A timeline can show what happened before what, while leaving those facts unresolved. It cannot establish a refund entitlement without the applicable terms and facts.

C is evidence of the July 4 cancellation and its stated effect. August 1 is the end of access, not a new renewal deadline stated in the receipt. Keep any proposed calendar reminder separate from an actual contractual deadline. A later charge would create a new comparison between the account history and the saved cancellation confirmation.

Your next move

Create a renewal calendar and evidence file. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

What evidence would you compare if a new monthly charge appeared after the saved cancellation confirmation?

11 The creator said “not sponsored”

UNIT 3 / Find who’s responsible

The question underneath: creator economy and disclosures

You watch a creator try a product, save the video, and send the link to a friend who has been comparing options. The fictional post opens with “Not sponsored, just obsessed.” That sounds like useful information: maybe the creator bought it independently and has nothing to gain if you buy it too.

But the same post directs viewers to a brand affiliate link. The practice dashboard says the creator receives an 8% commission on completed sales through that link. You do not need to decide whether the creator secretly dislikes the product. A recommendation can be sincere and still have a financial connection that changes how the audience evaluates it.

The scenario also describes travel and free products. The receipts do not give their value or spell out who supplied each benefit, so do not fill those gaps with guessed amounts. The commission is the relationship the documentary evidence establishes clearly. Start there, then identify what must be confirmed about the other benefits.

Your job is to make the disclosure useful while a viewer is deciding what to do. Imagine someone watches the beginning, never opens the bio, and buys later. What would that person understand? Write an opening that names the connection in ordinary language. Then explain what supporting details you would ask the creator to verify before the revised post goes live.

Words in the case

Affiliate commission

Payment tied to purchases attributed to a tracked referral link.

Material connection

A relationship that could affect an audience’s evaluation of an endorsement.

Disclosure

An explicit explanation of a relevant relationship or benefit.

Read the evidence

Source A shows the audience-facing claim and the affiliate link together. Source B adds the missing mechanism: an 8% commission on completed tracked sales. These documents support a clear statement that purchases can benefit the creator. They do not establish earnings, sales volume, or whether every viewer saw the link.

Source C summarizes a disclosure principle about material connections. Use it to explain why the relationship belongs where viewers can understand it. This teaching summary does not establish that a regulator investigated this creator, that a particular punishment applies, or that one sentence covers every benefit in the scenario.

Your next move

Rewrite the disclosure so the audience can understand the relationship early. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

How would disclosure change for a free product without commission? What additional evidence would you need?

12 The video is real. The voice is not.

UNIT 3 / Find who's responsible

The question underneath: deepfakes and provenance

A principal appears on screen, announcing a new policy. The setting looks familiar, the clip moves naturally, and the repost sounds confident. In this fictional case, students are being asked to change their understanding of a school rule based on that clip. Recognizing the person and place makes the message feel settled before anyone checks the sound.

The original recording changes the question. It shows the same visible event, but its audio differs from the viral version. That means "real or fake?" is too blunt a question for this evidence. The footage and the soundtrack need separate examination. Authentic images can carry a message that was never part of the recording.

The school's announcement archive provides a second check. It contains no announcement matching the viral audio, and the current policy notice says something different. This is stronger than deciding from a strange facial movement or a comment section. You can compare both the altered media and the claim about school policy with records closer to their origins.

A useful correction should travel back through the same conversation without repeating the false message as its headline. State what changed, point to the original and current notice, and leave the editor's identity unresolved. You can correct a claim without knowing who made the first altered copy or proving why anyone shared it.

Words in the case

Provenance

The documented origin and history of media.

Corroboration

Support from another relevant source when checking a claim.

Synthetic audio

Sound generated or reconstructed by software rather than preserved from the original recording.

Read the evidence

Compare Source A and Source B at the message level: the visible event matches, while the audio and claimed announcement do not. This supports identifying an altered soundtrack. The receipts do not identify a software tool, the first uploader, or a motive, so none belongs in a factual correction.

Source C checks the separate policy claim. Its current notice conflicts with the repost, providing institutional corroboration alongside the original video. Absence from an archive alone would be a weaker basis for declaring that nothing was ever said. Here, the comparison with Source A gives the correction additional support.

Your next move

Build a verification chain and draft a correction. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

Without A, what could C still establish, and which part of the correction would need qualifying?

13 Why did I get that ad?

UNIT 4 / Put it to the test

The question underneath: targeted advertising and privacy

Two teens browse college content and later receive different loan ads. One starts wondering whether the platform knows what their family can afford. Another thinks a single scholarship search caused the entire campaign. The fictional receipts make several signals visible, but they do not open the platform's complete decision process.

The ad-preferences page lists sneakers, college prep, and local events. Those are categories associated with the account, not a diary of every decision made about it. The advertiser's transparency card is more specific about this campaign: ages 16-20, selected ZIP codes, and interest in college planning. That gives you a useful place to start separating demographic, location, and interest information.

The activity log adds scholarship searches and college-tour videos. Those actions could relate to the college-planning interest, but a sequence is not a complete explanation. The receipts do not say how strongly any action counted, what other signals existed, or why one teen saw a different version from another.

Build a map that shows the difference between a documented setting and a proposed connection. Draw solid lines for what the receipts state and label possible links as "may contribute." The point is to make a complicated ad feel more inspectable without pretending that one screen reveals the whole system. No student needs to open or expose a personal account to complete this task.

Words in the case

Targeting

Selecting the audience an advertiser wants to reach.

Inferred interest

A category estimated from signals rather than necessarily provided directly.

Causal claim

A statement that one factor produced an outcome.

Read the evidence

Source B gives the clearest campaign-level evidence: its disclosed audience settings include ages, ZIP codes, and college-planning interest. Source A shows account categories, including college prep, but does not prove which category delivered this impression. The similarity between "college prep" and "college planning" is relevant, not proof of identical internal labels.

Source C documents behavior that might help explain the interest category. It cannot establish causation or an exact weight. None of A, B, or C demonstrates that the platform knows household income, that the ad offers a suitable loan, or that the two teens were treated differently for one identified reason.

Your next move

Map likely data signals without claiming certainty. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

What evidence could distinguish one search triggering this ad from the advertiser selecting a broad audience?

14 Can the school stop the story?

UNIT 4 / Put it to the test

The question underneath: student journalism and speech

The fictional student newspaper has drafted a story about cafeteria inspection records, with student comments included. Before publication, the question in the newsroom becomes whether the school can stop it. One answer treats any adviser review as censorship. That answer has not examined the policy or the specific facts.

The draft contains no private student records. That matters because the actual content needs review before anyone can explain a privacy concern. It does not mean every accuracy, privacy, or legal question is automatically resolved. A careful editor can defend the reporting while still checking whether quotations and the inspection findings have been presented fairly.

The publications policy calls for adviser review of accuracy, privacy, and legal concerns. It also says editorial authority follows district policy and applicable law. Read that language closely: a local process is described, but the excerpt does not settle every question about who gets the final decision or what legal protections apply.

Your task is to separate the questions that have become tangled together. What does the draft actually contain? What does the school's policy require? What constitutional or state-law context would need checking before a legal conclusion? Make an issue map an editor could bring to the adviser. Asking for the written basis of a concern is more useful than trying to win the entire dispute with one slogan.

Words in the case

Editorial authority

Responsibility or power to decide publication content.

Jurisdiction

The place or legal system relevant to a question.

School-sponsored publication

A publication connected to school support or oversight; exact status requires contextual facts.

Read the evidence

Source A establishes the subject and described contents of the draft, without private student records. Source B identifies a review process and the need to consult district policy and applicable law. B does not, by itself, prove that any proposed restriction is legally valid or that the adviser has unlimited power.

Source C warns that school sponsorship, jurisdiction, and other facts matter. It supports a contextual inquiry, not a universal outcome. A/B/C identify further questions: the publication’s status, the precise concern, the full district policy, and current law in the relevant jurisdiction. The receipts do not resolve those missing details.

Your next move

Separate constitutional, state-law, and school-policy questions. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

If the story appeared independently, which questions would change? Identify the publication-status facts you would verify.

15 Register, preregister, or wait?

UNIT 4 / Put it to the test

The question underneath: voter registration and official sources

The school reminder is easy to repost: “Everyone can register at 16!” It sounds encouraging and gives students something concrete to do. In this fictional evidence set, however, the official-source workflow and the sample state page do not support that universal claim. A helpful reminder can still send people toward the wrong action if it leaves out the place and eligibility conditions.

The practice state page says residents ages 16-17 may preregister, with registration becoming active when eligible. Preregistering and being eligible to vote are not interchangeable claims. The excerpt also belongs to one practice jurisdiction. Sending the same instruction to friends in other states could make the wording even less accurate.

Vote.gov is presented as a route to the relevant state rules, rather than a source for one nationwide birthday rule. The next useful questions are where the person would register, what the current official page says, and whether its instructions apply to that person. This case does not supply the state name, deadlines, or every eligibility requirement.

Create a neutral information card that a school could share without collecting anyone’s personal details or asking which candidates they support. Give the audience a reliable starting point and a short checklist for checking their own situation. The card succeeds when someone understands what to verify, including whether to register, preregister, or seek clarification from an election office.

Words in the case

Preregistration

An advance registration process governed by particular jurisdiction rules.

Eligibility

Conditions required to participate in a specific process.

Official source

Information from the institution responsible for a rule or service.

Read the evidence

Source A supports a state-specific lookup. Source B supplies an example of preregistration at ages 16-17, explicitly limited to the practice scenario. Source C turns that limited example into “everyone,” and also drops the difference between registration and preregistration. Those are the two errors a correction should address.

None of these receipts gives a current rule for a named reader’s jurisdiction. Do not add a deadline, identification requirement, or universal eligibility claim. The information card can be accurate by directing readers to their state's official election information and labeling the sample rule as an example rather than instructions for every student.

Your next move

Build a neutral voting-information card that sends users to their own official source. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

What should a reader moving between jurisdictions ask an official election office before following the card?

16 City, state, federal, or school?

UNIT 4 / Put it to the test

The question underneath: levels of authority

The group chat contains four complaints: a bus route changed, a graduation requirement is confusing, a passport rule affects a trip, and a classroom deadline feels impossible. Someone suggests sending all four to a high-profile elected official. It would produce one satisfying message, but it might not reach the people who can explain or change each decision.

The practice authority map connects route operations with a local transit agency, many graduation rules with a state education agency or legislature, passports with the federal government, and course deadlines with a teacher or school. These connections are starting points. They do not identify every applicable policy, staff role, or exception in a real location.

The most visible person is not always the first useful contact. A teacher may explain a course deadline but cannot rewrite a passport requirement. A school may help interpret graduation requirements even when it does not control all of them. Separate the person who can explain a rule from the institution that has authority to change it.

Choose one scenario and build a short authority ladder. Put the decision owner first, then the written rule you would request, then any review or appeal route the rule actually provides. A ladder does not mean every concern automatically climbs to the same person at the top. It should show a realistic route for this particular question, with missing information labeled.

Words in the case

Authority

Assigned power to make a particular decision.

Implementation

Putting an established rule or decision into practice.

Appeal

A request for review through a process provided by the relevant rules.

Read the evidence

Source A identifies four decisions but supplies no actual notices, locations, or complete rules. Source B maps each decision to an institution or role. Because B describes “many” graduation rules and deadlines “subject to higher rules,” a diagram that treats each level as completely separate would misread the evidence.

Source C supplies a process principle: begin with the decision owner and use a higher-level appeal where the rule provides it. It does not promise an appeal for every issue or authorize bypassing the first contact. A/B/C support a qualified route, not a guarantee that a particular office must reverse a decision.

Your next move

Build an authority ladder for the specific decision. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

If an office does not own the decision, what evidence-based referral should you request next?

17 Can I see the record behind the decision?

UNIT 5 / Take it public

The question underneath: public records and meeting records

The club's funding request was denied for "insufficient documentation." In this fictional case, that phrase is the only explanation students initially have. It does not tell them which document was missing, which criterion was affected, or how the committee reached its decision. The next move could be an accusation, but a precise records question may produce information they can actually use.

The evidence set identifies a funding rubric with criterion scores and committee minutes recording a motion and vote. Those are different kinds of records. A score sheet can help show how criteria were applied. Minutes can show the recorded action without necessarily reproducing every comment or conversation that preceded it.

The procedure says students may request specified student-government records through the clerk. It also warns that institutional and public-record rules vary. A route for making a request is not a promise that every record will be released. Some information may be restricted, and the excerpt does not identify the rules or exemptions for this particular institution.

Write a request someone could locate and answer. Refer to the club's funding application, its decision notice, the corresponding scores, and the meeting record. Ask how to clarify the request if an identifier is missing. Keep your request focused on the decision you are investigating, rather than asking for every student's financial or personal information to prove that the process was unfair.

Words in the case

Minutes

A meeting's institutional record, not necessarily a verbatim transcript.

Redaction

Masking particular information within a released document.

Records request

A request for identifiable records through the relevant access procedure.

Read the evidence

Source A establishes the denial and its stated reason, not whether that reason was correctly applied. Source B identifies records that could connect criteria with the recorded decision. It proves neither unfair treatment nor a complete record of the review.

Source C names the clerk as the request route and limits the access claim by noting institutional and legal variation. A request can ask for available portions and an explanation of withheld material, but these receipts do not guarantee release, a response deadline, or a successful challenge. Any claimed exemption needs a relevant rule, not a guess.

Your next move

Write a narrow records request and identify what may be exempt. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

If the clerk provides minutes but no scores, what conclusion and focused follow-up would be justified?

18 A petition is not the decision

UNIT 5 / Take it public

The question underneath: advocacy, petitions, public comment

The students have collected 1,248 signatures asking the city to add evening bus service. The fictional petition addresses a practical concern: getting home later can affect access to work, activities, and time with friends. The number makes the request visible. A celebratory post begins to treat that visibility as if the buses have already been approved.

The relevant institution here is the transit board. Its agenda says it will receive the petition and obtain staff ridership and cost analysis, with no vote at that meeting. Read those actions separately. Receiving a petition means it has reached a process stage. Asking for analysis means there are questions to investigate before a decision. Neither phrase announces new service.

A later resolution changes the evidence: after the staff report, the board approves a six-month pilot. Now there is a formal decision, but its scope still matters. A pilot is a time-limited trial in this record. The receipts do not supply a launch date, route timetable, evaluation findings, or a promise that the service will continue permanently.

Build a plan that keeps supporters accurately informed at each stage. Before the vote, ask how riders can contribute useful information to the analysis. After the resolution, ask where the implementation details will appear and how the pilot will be reviewed. Advocacy does not end when an institution listens, and reporting a partial success accurately does not diminish it.

Words in the case

Petition

A request supported by signatures; its procedural effect depends on the system.

Resolution

A governing body’s formal recorded decision.

Pilot

A limited trial before a longer-term decision.

Read the evidence

Source A establishes the size and purpose of the petition: 1,248 signatures for evening bus service. It does not show signature verification, projected ridership, or a formal decision. Source B explicitly says no vote at that meeting, so “petition approved” would misstate what the board was scheduled to do.

Source C documents the later approval of a six-month pilot after staff analysis. The chronology supports distinguishing public support, investigation, and authorization. It does not prove signatures alone caused the vote or establish permanent service. A strong plan uses C to update the status without reading unprovided operating details into the resolution.

Your next move

Turn the petition into a decision-path plan. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

What evidence during the pilot could support a continuation request without treating anecdotes as overall ridership data?

19 Turning 18 changes some things, not everything

UNIT 5 / Take it public

The question underneath: legal adulthood basics

A senior gets a new ID and starts thinking about what turning 18 changes. In the fictional scenario, a phone plan helps spark the conversation, but the actual contract receipt is for a gym membership.

The transition checklist points toward a different habit: check the issue before assuming the rule. Voting eligibility, contracts, medical consent and privacy, school records, selective service where applicable, and tax or ID matters are listed separately. The checklist names topics to investigate. It does not supply every age threshold or tell every student which requirements apply to them.

The school notice describes one education-records change at 18 and directs students to school access procedures. That is narrower than saying every parent-school relationship automatically ends. The gym example adds a practical reading task: a 12-month term and cancellation conditions need attention before someone agrees. An age milestone does not explain the contract's full costs or exit process.

Make a "check before you assume" card for someone approaching this transition. Organize it by decision, responsible source, and next question. Leave space for location and circumstances where those matter. Your card should make it easier to find the right answer without implying that everyone has the same family arrangements, citizenship situation, financial responsibilities, or access to adult support.

Words in the case

Term

The stated period an agreement remains in effect.

Cancellation conditions

Specified steps or circumstances for ending an agreement.

Education-record rights

Rights concerning covered school records, interpreted under applicable rules and procedures.

Read the evidence

Source A provides an issue inventory rather than a complete statement of law. Source B describes a specific education-records transition and points to school procedures. Read it as the notice in this practice case; it does not resolve all exceptions, every access question, or all communications between school and family.

Source C establishes that the sample gym contract includes a 12-month term and cancellation conditions. It does not give the fee amount, notice period, or a jurisdiction's rules on enforceability.

Combining A/B/C supports targeted questions and source routing, not a universal adulthood checklist with made-up legal deadlines.

Your next move

Build a “check before you assume” adulthood card. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

Choose an unexplained item from A. What exact question would you bring to its responsible source?

20 Before you sign the lease

UNIT 5 / Take it public

The question underneath: contracts and leases intro

The apartment listing conversation keeps returning to one number: $1,150. The fictional lease front page makes the decision more complicated. It lists a term from August 1 through July 31, a $1,150 security deposit, and utilities separately from rent.

The rent and deposit alone total $2,300 if both are being considered together, but the excerpt does not specify when every payment is due. It also does not provide utility estimates or the complete move-in bill.

The addendum names guests, pets, subletting, move-out notice, damage charges, and a renter's insurance requirement. Those headings can affect ordinary plans, such as having someone stay over or leaving before the term ends. The receipt does not provide the detailed clauses. Treat each heading as something to obtain and read, not permission to guess a restriction or a fee.

The move-in checklist focuses on evidence: dated photos of existing damage, a signed copy, and payment records. Documentation helps preserve what the renter observed and agreed to, but it does not settle every tenant-rights question. Annotate the receipts, then draft five questions for the landlord or property manager. Identify any question that also needs a current local tenant resource rather than relying only on the owner's explanation.

Words in the case

Addendum

Additional terms that may form part of an agreement.

Security deposit

Money listed separately from rent, governed by applicable terms and rules.

Move-in record

Documentation of condition and transactions when occupancy begins.

Read the evidence

Source A gives the rent, deposit, lease term, and separate utilities. It supports distinguishing recurring rent from a deposit, but not a complete budget or payment schedule. Source B supplies additional categories and an insurance requirement; the effect of its terms depends on the actual language and incorporation into the agreement.

Source C recommends preserving condition and transaction records. It is a documentation checklist, not a statement that any particular deduction or clause is lawful. None of A/B/C supplies jurisdiction-specific tenant law. An annotation should therefore separate stated obligations, missing details, and legal questions requiring an appropriate local source.

Your next move

Annotate the lease and write five questions before signing. Include one clear claim or question, at least two source references, one statement of uncertainty/scope, the person or office with relevant authority, and one realistic next step. A paper route must teach the same skill as any digital route.

Try the idea somewhere else

If a verbal answer conflicts with the addendum, what should you request before signing?