

newspapers such as the *New York Times*, are the safest to use. In the case of our alien encounter, it might have been true (it isn't), but without double-checking it, it may also be:

- *A lie.* The writer simply made up the statistic either out of a desire to mislead or because she has herself misunderstood.
- *Bad data.* Basing the statistic on asking 100 Americans who were attending an expo for those who say they have encountered aliens, then extrapolating that to the public at large simply doesn't make sense.
- *A "blip."* All survey methods occasionally just get something wrong. The more accurate the method, the less often this happens, but rogue polls are a reality of research;
- *Irrelevant.* Even were it true, the fact that 84% said they have encountered aliens doesn't actually mean that they have; people say all sorts of odd things, especially to strangers with clipboards.

Apply this type of critical thinking to all your sources.

Corroborating Evidence

Whatever source you use, verify the information elsewhere. Even well-intentioned writers can make mistakes, and information also simply becomes outdated. Corroborating information with another source will also allow you to check that you have correctly understood what is being said. In part, checking is simply good practice; it's good to tell the truth. However, it's also good strategy. If you cite a piece of evidence that is wrong, and another speaker points this out (or the audience already knows this), the audience will mistrust the rest of that argument and probably your whole case. Karl Popper debate takes the most rigorous approach to accuracy in evidence, expecting debaters to be able to provide exact citations for the evidence they are using. Other formats are less stringent; however, it's not the worst idea in the world to have this information to hand. Clearly, this advice relates particularly to the harder end of the evidence scale we looked at earlier, but being able to reassure your audience that you have reasonable grounds for believing information to be correct will help you make bolder claims than are possible on evidence that your listener may have grounds to mistrust.