Objective: Explore concepts and methods in the verification of ‘facts’.

While the need and methods to verify ‘facts’ did not emerge with the advent of the Internet, the amount of readily accessible information has vastly multiplied. A further issue is whether facts constitute knowledge or if more is required to be sure of something. With many sources, multiple perspectives, and, in some cases, significant contestation, ‘facts’ are not always so simple to ascertain. Further, not everything is documented digitally or at all. These concerns, of course, are central to philosophy and epistemology, subjects well beyond this resource. Here we provide a few sources that can help educators and students work through some of these issues.

These resources complement the Understanding the Horn lessons on “Fun Facts” and “Popular Culture, Global Knowledge and Kenya’s First Internet Meme”. Other related resources on this site include:
- Library Bibliographic Research Tools
- Literature Review Assignment Guide
- Using Wikipedia in the Classroom

A Few Concepts

Have the students explore these concepts by looking up and discussing the following entries either in the Oxford Dictionary of Social Science, Wikipedia or other online sources. What other concepts emerge as salient in this discussion?

- deconstruction
- empiricism
- epistemology
- fact–value distinction
- knowledge
- intersubjectivity
- objectivity
- positivism


Explore a ‘fact’ from the Horn of Africa that has turned out to be not so factual:

The population of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya

Long held to be the largest slum in East Africa, Kibera, a community centrally located in Nairobi has attracted much attention from the international community. Many estimated the population to be from 1 to 1.5 million in Kibera. Yet the 2009 Kenyan census counted only 170,000 residents which matched the result of other rigorous efforts to measure the population, including the Map Kibera Project and a GIS project by the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) Nairobi and Keyobs, a Belgian company (Desgroppes and Taupin, 2011).
Activities: Read the materials below. Do some searches on the population size of Kibera to see what various sites report. Discuss why widely used estimates have been so wrong. What is the value of getting the numbers right?


Further Resources on ‘fact-checking’


**Note:** You may need to access this and other articles through interlibrary loan if your library does not subscribe to the journals or provide electronic access. Check with your local library regarding the service. The US Library of Congress has an interlibrary loan service, as does the UC Berkeley Library. For a broader overview of interlibrary loan processes, see the Wikipedia article, “Interlibrary Loan.” 2013. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Interlibrary_loan&oldid=563014709.