

PAPER TRAIL

Answer Key

TEACHER ONLY

Answers are NOT canonical
Use as a discussion anchor

This key documents one reasonable reading of each claim's trail: the real source, what it actually shows, and the intended tells. It is NOT canonical — students may reasonably spot additional tells or describe the drift differently. Use this as a discussion anchor, not a grading rubric.

CLAIM 01 · HEALTH × MARKETING

A detox tea account says a “nutrition journal review” proves their 14-day cleanse flushes toxins and “resets” your liver — the post has gone viral with dieters.

REAL SOURCE:

Klein AV, Kiat H. Detox diets for toxin elimination and weight management: a critical review of the evidence. Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics. 2015;28(6):675–686.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real review found very little clinical evidence for commercial detox diets and no RCTs of them at all in humans.

- Tell: “nutritionscienceinstitute.example” is not the real journal's domain.
- Tell: the release never quotes the review's actual conclusion.
- Verify: the real review is skeptical of detox claims, not supportive.

CLAIM 02 · HEALTH × MARKETING

An ad for a wearable “fat-burning patch” says it’s “clinically proven safe and effective” for weight loss, citing a study on wearable biofeedback devices.

REAL SOURCE:

Chimatapu SN, Mittelman SD, Habib M, Osuna-Garcia A, Vidmar AP. Wearable Devices Beyond Activity Trackers in Youth With Obesity: Summary of Options. Childhood Obesity. 2024;20(3):208–218.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study was a scoping review of wearable biofeedback devices (including CGMs) in pediatric obesity care — about safety/feasibility, not fat-burning.

- Tell: “clinically proven safe AND effective” overstates a feasibility review.
- Tell: press release never says what the devices were tracking.
- Verify: the real review is about youth, not general adult fat loss.

CLAIM 03 · HEALTH × MARKETING

A sleep-gummy ad says its melatonin blend is “clinically proven” to cut the time it takes adults to fall asleep in half — citing a randomized clinical trial.

REAL SOURCE:

K GP, Mundada S, Zambani J, Joshi T, Khaire P, Pawar S, Shelke M. Oral Melatonin Supplementation for Sleep Disturbances in Children with Cerebral Palsy: A Randomized Double-Blind Controlled Trial. Indian Journal of Pediatrics. 2025;93(3):259–264.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real RCT tested escalating-dose melatonin (3–10mg) in children with cerebral palsy under medical supervision — not adult OTC gummies.

- Tell: badge links to a fake “sleepresearchcenter.example” domain.
- Tell: press release omits the study population entirely.
- Verify: the real trial population and dosing don't match the product.

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CLAIM 04 · HEALTH × MARKETING

A gut-health influencer says her probiotic brand is “clinically shown” to improve anxiety and mood for anyone who takes it, citing a peer-reviewed study.

REAL SOURCE:

Łagowska K, Ptaszyńska D. *Effects of Probiotic Supplementation on Mental Health and the Risk of Depression in Women with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome: A Systematic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials.* *Nutrients.* 2026;18(2):307.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real systematic review covered only 5 small studies of probiotics in women with PCOS — not the general population.

- Tell: “clinically shown to improve mood” overstates 5 small studies.
- Tell: press release omits the specific health condition studied.
- Verify: the real review's population is narrow and its evidence is limited.

CLAIM 05 · HEALTH × POLITICS

A campaign post claims a new international study “proves” that soda taxes cut obesity, and urges voters to support renewing the local sugary-drink tax.

REAL SOURCE:

Seweryn M, Bała MM, Juszczak G, Nowak F, Jankowska EP. *Sugar tax in Poland: population-level trends in obesity, sugar consumption and healthcare utilization.* *Frontiers in Public Health.* 2026;14:1811509.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real Poland study found obesity kept rising after the sugar tax; the authors explicitly caution against causal claims.

- Tell: campaign claims the tax “works” without saying what happened to obesity.
- Tell: release omits the study's own causal-inference caveat.
- Verify: the real study shows continued obesity growth post-tax.

CLAIM 06 · HEALTH × POLITICS

An advocacy group's post says a “new study proves” a common food dye is poisoning children, and calls for an immediate statewide ban.

REAL SOURCE:

Bischoff NS, Bussi MR, Van Breda SG, Jolani S, Sijm DTHM, de Kok TM, Briédé JJ. *Food-grade titanium dioxide exposure between age groups and in global regions: a systematic review and meta-analysis.* *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition.* 2025;65(31):7325–7335.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real meta-analysis measured how much titanium dioxide people of different ages consume — it did not test for health harm.

- Tell: “confirmed by peer-reviewed research” implies a harm finding that isn't there.
- Tell: release never states what the study actually measured.
- Verify: the real study is an exposure study, not a toxicity/harm study.

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CLAIM 07 · HEALTH × MARKETING

A wellness influencer's post says a "Stanford study" proved her favorite greens powder reverses aging by ten years — and it's already been shared thousands of times.

REAL SOURCE:

Polom J, Boccardi V. *Employing Nutrition to Delay Aging: A Plant-Based Telomere-Friendly Dietary Revolution. Nutrients. 2025;17(12):2004.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real narrative review discusses general diet-telomere mechanisms — it never mentions a specific product or a 10-year aging reversal.

- Tell: "stanfordwellnessinstitute.org" does not match Stanford's real domain (stanford.edu).
- Tell: press release admits the study wasn't run on BrightGreens' own product.
- Verify: the real review makes no product claims and no 10-year figure.

CLAIM 09 · SCIENCE × MARKETING

An ad for an "AI-powered" skincare scanner says it's "proven 86% accurate" at reading your skin's age and health, citing a peer-reviewed study of the technology.

REAL SOURCE:

Mijares J, Bisch EJ, DeGuzman E, Garg K, Pontes D, Jairath NK, Ramachandran V, Jeha G, Nemcevic A, Que SKT. *Validation of a Dermatology-Focused Multimodal Image-and-Data Assistant in Diagnosis and Management of Common Dermatologic Conditions. Medicina. 2026;62(4):715.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study validated an AI assistant's accuracy at diagnosing dermatologic conditions (rashes, lesions) in a clinical triage context — not a beauty scanner.

- Tell: "skinsenseai.example" links to a fabricated "validation" page.
- Tell: release never says what the AI was actually diagnosing.
- Verify: the real study is about disease diagnosis, not skin-age scoring.

CLAIM 10 · SCIENCE × MARKETING

An ad for blue-light-blocking glasses says a "Cochrane review" — the gold standard of medical evidence — confirms they improve sleep and reduce eye strain.

REAL SOURCE:

Singh S, Keller PR, Busija L, McMillan P, Makrai E, Lawrenson JG, Hull CC, Downie LE. *Blue-light filtering spectacle lenses for visual performance, sleep, and macular health in adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2023;8(8):CD013244.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real Cochrane review found little to no clear benefit of blue-light lenses for eye strain, sleep, or visual performance, with mostly low-certainty evidence.

- Tell: "gold standard of medical evidence" is being used to imply a positive result.
- Tell: release never states what the review actually concluded.
- Verify: the real Cochrane review is a near-null result, not an endorsement.

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CLAIM 11 · SCIENCE × MARKETING

An ad for a “quantum energy” bracelet says a published sports-science study proves it boosts athletic performance and endurance.

REAL SOURCE:

Sells PD, Cavicchio H, Everhart B, Grass B, Lambert J, Robinson K. Effect of a negative ion holographic bracelet on maximal aerobic performance. Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research. 2014;28(10):2895–2899.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real double-blind study found holographic/negative-ion wristbands had no significant effect on VO₂max, endurance, or heart rate at ventilatory threshold.

- Tell: “this isn’t placebo, it’s physics” directly contradicts the real finding.
- Tell: release never states the study’s actual result.
- Verify: the cited study is the one that debunked this exact product category.

CLAIM 12 · SCIENCE × MARKETING

An ad for a home “carbon-capture” air purifier says a new peer-reviewed climate study proves the technology is the best way to fight climate change.

REAL SOURCE:

Kashtan Y, Michanowicz DR, Shonkoff SBC, Pendleton J, Sousa B, Willis MD, Buonocore JJ. Direct air capture has substantial health and climate opportunity costs. Communications Sustainability. 2026.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study found renewable energy delivers more climate/health benefit per dollar than direct air capture in nearly every US scenario modeled.

- Tell: a home air purifier is not the industrial-scale DAC the study modeled.
- Tell: release never states the study’s actual comparison or conclusion.
- Verify: the real study is skeptical of DAC investment relative to alternatives.

CLAIM 13 · SCIENCE × POLITICS

A political commentator’s post says “the data proves global warming has stopped” because 2025 was cooler than 2024, citing a major new climate science report.

REAL SOURCE:

Forster PM, Walsh T, Smith C, et al. Indicators of Global Climate Change 2025: annual update of key indicators of the state of the climate system and human influence. Earth System Science Data. 2026;18:3889–3933.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real report finds human-induced warming still increasing (1.37°C in 2025, record energy imbalance) even though 2025 was cooler than 2024 due to La Niña.

- Tell: one cooler year is being used to claim warming “stopped.”
- Tell: release omits the report’s rate-of-warming and 1.5°C timeline findings.
- Verify: the real report’s headline finding is acceleration, not a pause.

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CLAIM 14 · SCIENCE × POLITICS

A city council candidate's post says a new study "proves" that better street lighting cuts violent crime, and calls for the city to fund a citywide lighting upgrade.

REAL SOURCE:

Cadena-Urzuúa P, Guardiola J, Montes F. *The impact of public lighting improvement on crimes and incivilities reduction in Chile. Frontiers in Sociology. 2025;10:1541359.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real Chile study found lighting improvements reduced some property crimes and incivilities, but violent robbery specifically showed no significant change.

- Tell: "violent crime" is claimed without checking which crimes were measured.
- Tell: release omits which specific crime types changed.
- Verify: the real study's effect on violent crime specifically is null.

CLAIM 15 · SCIENCE × POLITICS

An advocacy group supporting a ballot measure to label GMO foods says a new toxicology study "proves" genetically modified crops are dangerous to eat.

REAL SOURCE:

Tijjani MB, Ibrahim AM. *Evaluating the safety of genetically modified crops: Findings from toxicological meta-research. Animal Biology (Biol Tvarin). 2025;27(3):27–41.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real meta-analysis found over 90% of studies show no acute toxicity, with a minority reporting subtle metabolic changes only on chronic exposure.

- Tell: "dangerous to eat" overstates a hedged, mixed-evidence meta-analysis.
- Tell: release omits the percentage of studies finding no adverse effects.
- Verify: the real study's tone is cautious, not alarmed.

CLAIM 16 · SCIENCE × POLITICS

A political ad opposing an electric-vehicle mandate says a peer-reviewed study "proves" EV batteries produce more emissions than gas cars.

REAL SOURCE:

Sadavarte P, Shindell D, Loughlin D. *Comparing the climate and air pollution footprints of Lithium-ion BEVs and ICEs in the US incorporating systemic energy system responses. PLOS Climate. 2025;4(10):e0000714.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study found BEVs emit ~30% more CO₂ than gas cars only in the first two years; after that, cumulative BEV emissions are lower for the rest of the vehicle's life.

- Tell: "more emissions than gas cars" is true only for a specific 2-year window.
- Tell: release omits what happens after year two.
- Verify: the real study's overall conclusion favors BEVs over the vehicle's lifetime.

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CLAIM 08 · HEALTH × POLITICS

An advocacy group's post says a new study “proves” that insulin price caps save money and improve health for every patient, urging Congress to expand the policy nationwide.

REAL SOURCE:

Giannouchos TV, Ukert B, Buchmueller T. Health Outcome Changes in Individuals With Type 1 Diabetes After a State-Level Insulin Copayment Cap. JAMA Network Open. 2024;7(8):e2425280.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real Colorado study found the copay cap's health benefit was concentrated in patients who had previously spent over \$100 out of pocket — not everyone.

- Tell: “every patient” overstates a subgroup-specific finding.
- Tell: release omits which patients actually benefited.
- Verify: the real study shows uneven benefit, not universal improvement.

CLAIM 17 · POLITICS

A candidate's post says a Stanford/Harvard/Penn study “proves” widespread voter fraud in presidential elections, and calls for stricter voter ID laws.

REAL SOURCE:

Goel S, Meredith M, Morse M, Rothschild D, Shirani-Mehr H. One Person, One Vote: Estimating the Prevalence of Double Voting in U.S. Presidential Elections. American Political Science Review. 2020;114(2):456–469.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study estimated the upper bound on double voting in the 2012 election at about 1 in 4,000 — and noted the true rate is likely even lower due to measurement error.

- Tell: “widespread” contradicts a rate of roughly 0.025%.
- Tell: release omits the estimated rate entirely.
- Verify: the real study's own audit suggests the rate is an overestimate.

CLAIM 18 · POLITICS

A political attack ad says an incumbent “voted against fair wages for working families,” based on a single scorecard grade from an advocacy group.

REAL SOURCE:

Charnock EJ. More Than a Score: Interest Group Ratings and Polarized Politics. Studies in American Political Development. 2018;32(1):49–78.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real article documents how 20th-century scorecards could reduce a lawmaker's record to a single procedural vote (e.g. a 1937 motion to recommit) and produce a stark up/down grade.

- Tell: a single scorecard grade is treated as the whole voting record.
- Tell: release never names the specific vote behind the grade.
- Verify: the real article's whole point is that these grades can mislead.

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CLAIM 19 · POLITICS

A candidate's post says official FBI data “proves” that most violent crimes in his city go completely unsolved, citing the city's new crime database numbers.

REAL SOURCE:

Cross TP, Wagner A, Bibel D. The Accuracy of Arrest Data in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Crime & Delinquency. 2022.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study found NIBRS “unsolved” labels were incorrect in about 16% of sampled cases — mostly data-entry timing issues, not real enforcement gaps.

- Tell: “official data” is treated as automatically accurate.
- Tell: release omits the known data-entry issue entirely.
- Verify: the real study is specifically about this kind of false negative.

CLAIM 20 · POLITICS

A campaign's post says their internal poll “proves” they're safely ahead by 4 points, “outside the margin of error,” citing statistical research on polling accuracy.

REAL SOURCE:

Shirani-Mehr H, Rothschild D, Goel S, Gelman A. Disentangling Bias and Variance in Election Polls. Journal of the American Statistical Association. 2018;113(522):607–614.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study found average real-world polling error (~3.5 points RMSE) runs about twice as large as typically reported margins of error.

- Tell: “outside the margin of error” assumes the stated margin is the real error.
- Tell: release omits the study's actual error-size finding.
- Verify: the real study is the reason pollsters now discuss underreported error.

CLAIM 21 · MARKETING

An ad for an anti-aging face cream says it's “clinically proven” in a randomized trial to outperform prescription retinoid treatment.

REAL SOURCE:

McDaniel DH, Mazur C, Wortzman MS, Nelson DB. Efficacy and tolerability of a double-conjugated retinoid cream vs 1.0% retinol cream or 0.025% tretinoin cream in subjects with mild to severe photoaging. Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology. 2017;16(4):542–548.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real trial compared a specific proprietary cream (not Lumina's) to retinol and tretinoin — it was single-blind, 48 subjects, 12 weeks, and “noninferior” in most categories, not superior.

- Tell: the tested product is never named as a different company's formula.
- Tell: “outperform” overstates a noninferiority result.
- Verify: the real study's product isn't Lumina's.

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CLAIM 22 · MARKETING

An ad for at-home teeth whitening strips says “doctors hate this trick” because a peer-reviewed study proves strips whiten just as well as a dentist.

REAL SOURCE:

da Rosa GRV, Maran BM, Schmitt VL, Loguercio AD, Reis A, Naufel FS. Effectiveness of Whitening Strips Use Compared With Supervised Dental Bleaching: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Operative Dentistry*. 2020;45(6):E289–E307.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real meta-analysis found dentist-supervised bleaching produced a greater color change than strips (though undetectable to the naked eye); strips only won on lower sensitivity.

- Tell: “just as well as the dentist” reverses which treatment actually won on color.
- Tell: release omits the sensitivity/color trade-off entirely.
- Verify: the real meta-analysis favors supervised bleaching for color change.

CLAIM 23 · MARKETING

An “as seen on TV” ab-toning belt says a published exercise-science study proves it builds muscle and burns fat with zero effort.

REAL SOURCE:

Porcari JP, McLean KP, Foster C, Kernozek T, Crenshaw B, Swenson C. Effects of electrical muscle stimulation on body composition, muscle strength, and physical appearance. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*. 2002;16(2):165–172.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study found EMS ab-belt use had no significant effect on any measured outcome — body weight, fat, strength, or appearance.

- Tell: “zero effort” claims contradict a study finding zero effect.
- Tell: release never states the study's actual result.
- Verify: this is the classic study that helped get NMES belts pulled from shelves.

CLAIM 24 · HEALTH

An ad for an ashwagandha supplement says a Phase III clinical trial proves it cures anxiety for anyone who takes it.

REAL SOURCE:

Pattojoshi A, Kumar Patra S, Idrees SA, Behera S, Dalua SS, Tiwari P, Valavan R. Safety and efficacy of ashwagandha (a standardized withania somnifera extract) in stress and anxiety with hypertension and associated cardiometabolic risk factors: a randomized, placebo-controlled trial. *Stress*. 2026;29(1):2669544.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real Phase III trial tested one specific branded extract in patients with pre-existing hypertension and cardiometabolic risk — and reduced symptoms, not eliminated them.

- Tell: “cures anxiety” overstates a symptom-reduction trial in a narrow population.
- Tell: release omits the branded extract's name and the study population.
- Verify: the real trial's population and outcome don't match “cures for anyone.”

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CLAIM 25 · HEALTH

A fitness influencer's post says a new study proves this ONE ab exercise burns belly fat better than any other workout, citing exercise-science research.

REAL SOURCE:

Zourmand G, Shaabani Ezdini E, Taheri M, Irandoust K. *Impact of regional and general aerobic exercise on molecular regulators of lipolysis and adipose tissue composition in obese women. Cellular and Molecular Biology. 2025;71(10):111–116.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real trial found general and combined aerobic training beat regional-only training for fat loss; the authors call “spot reduction” controversial.

- Tell: “this ONE exercise” contradicts a study favoring general/combined training.
- Tell: release omits which training group actually won.
- Verify: the real study does not endorse a single targeted move.

CLAIM 26 · HEALTH

A wellness coach's post says a peer-reviewed study proves intermittent fasting reverses type 2 diabetes, and that anyone can do it without a doctor's help.

REAL SOURCE:

Yang X, Zhou J, Shao H, Huang B, Kang X, Wu R, Bian F, Hu M, Liu D. *Effect of an Intermittent Calorie-restricted Diet on Type 2 Diabetes Remission: A Randomized Controlled Trial. Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism. 2023;108(6):1415–1424.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real RCT tested a specific, medically supervised nutrition therapy — not casual fasting — with medication changes made only under clinical guidance.

- Tell: “without a doctor's help” contradicts a medically supervised protocol.
- Tell: release omits the structured nature of the intervention.
- Verify: the real trial isn't a template for unsupervised fasting.

CLAIM 27 · SCIENCE

A crowdfunding battery startup says a peer-reviewed physics paper proves room-temperature superconductors are real, and that their new battery technology uses the breakthrough.

REAL SOURCE:

Jain PK. *Superionic Phase Transition of Copper(I) Sulfide and Its Implication for Purported Superconductivity of LK-99. Journal of Physical Chemistry C. 2023;127(37):18253–18255.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real paper explains LK-99's apparent superconductivity as a copper-sulfide impurity artifact — it argues against the breakthrough, not for it.

- Tell: a debunking paper is cited as “confirmation.”
- Tell: release never states the paper's actual conclusion.
- Verify: the real paper's title and argument are the opposite of what's claimed.



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CLAIM 28 · SCIENCE

A space-themed lifestyle brand says a peer-reviewed astronomy paper confirms scientists found signs of alien life on a distant planet.

REAL SOURCE:

Stevenson KB, Lustig-Yaeger J, May EM, Kopparapu RK, Fauchez TJ, Haqq-Misra J, Limbach MA, Schwieterman EW, Sotzen KS, Tsai SM. K2-18b Does Not Meet the Standards of Evidence for Life. *The Astronomical Journal*. 2025;170(5):257.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real paper's title is "K2-18b Does Not Meet the Standards of Evidence for Life" — it found the apparent biosignature was likely an instrument artifact.

- Tell: the paper title itself directly contradicts the claim.
- Tell: release never quotes the paper's actual finding.
- Verify: reading the title alone resolves this one.

CLAIM 29 · SCIENCE

A parenting influencer's post says a new study proves screen time lowers children's IQ, and pushes a paid "screen-free" parenting course as the fix.

REAL SOURCE:

Oh Y, Baek JH, Joung YS. Intelligence-Dependent Differential Effects of Media Exposure on Executive Function Changes in Children: A Population-Based Cohort Study With a Longitudinal Design. *Journal of Korean Medical Science*. 2023;38(48):e411.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real cohort study measured executive function, not IQ directly, and found the effect of media exposure was moderated by children's starting IQ.

- Tell: "lowers IQ" substitutes for a more specific, conditional finding.
- Tell: release omits that the outcome measured wasn't IQ.
- Verify: the real study's title says "intelligence-dependent," not "IQ-lowering."

CLAIM 30 · SCIENCE × MARKETING

An ad for a quinoa-based "superfood" supplement says a new study proves quinoa fights cancer, citing peer-reviewed research.

REAL SOURCE:

Zhou M, Guo H, Du J, Xiao T, Wu H, Li Z. Triterpenoids from quinoa bran exert anti-colorectal cancer effects via oxidative stress-mediated apoptosis and immune reactivation. *Food & Function*. 2026;17(10):4591–4606.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY SHOWS:

The real study tested an extracted compound from quinoa bran in mice and cell cultures — not whole quinoa in people.

- Tell: "take my quinoa superfood blend" implies a human dietary study.
- Tell: release omits both the extracted-compound and animal/cell details.
- Verify: the real study's subjects are mice and cell lines, not people.