

How to Not Be Gullible

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Being a trusting person is a good thing, but it's also important to have a healthy dose of skepticism. Otherwise, you might find yourself believing things that aren't true and being taken advantage of by others. Fortunately, it's possible to strike the right balance, even if you're typically a little gullible (no shame—we can all be gullible sometimes!). To help you out, we've put together some tips on how to think critically, avoid tricks and scams, and not be gullible anymore.

Part
1

Part 1 of 3: Becoming a More Critical Thinker



1 Do not rush to make big decisions. Blindly committing to a big decision may lead to consequences you might regret later.^[1] This is also the tact some people use to lure people into making a commitment without fully considering the ramifications, such as a real estate agent, a prospective employer, or a partner. A spontaneous decision often is a poorly considered one.^[2]

- Do not make a decision based on one person's opinion because you are afraid will make the wrong one. If you are indecisive, a person who has something to gain from you may turn that against you. They'll assure you that it is the right one, what are you waiting for? But if a person is afraid or scornful of waiting for another opinion, or doing research, or otherwise weighing your options...that is a warning sign.
- Beware of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). FOMO can mean that you are afraid that if you do not act now, you will miss out on an opportunity that will never present itself again. Chances are good that is not the case.
- Keep in mind that people who try to force you to quickly make a decision instead of giving you time to make an educated choice are often doing so precisely because they don't want you to do any outside research; they don't want you to be able to call their bluff.



2 Be more skeptical. While you may not want to be a completely skeptical person just to avoid being gullible, if you tend to be too naive, then you should work on being a bit more critical when you approach a situation. Whether your older brother is telling you a story about your neighbor or a telemarketer is trying to offer you a discount on your phone plan, you should work on having your guard up and asking yourself and the person you're with whether the information could possibly be true.^[3]

- Sure, this may make some social situations a bit more unpleasant than they would be if you were agreeable and went along with everything a person said, but this will keep you from being gullible.
- Whenever you're given a new piece of information, ask yourself how much you can rely on the source, how likely it is to be true, and what counterarguments a person might make to the contrary.



3 Make people earn your trust. You don't have to be completely distrustful just because you want to be less naive; however, if you really want to work on not being gullible, then you can't go around trusting every person who comes by your side. Get to know people and establish a relationship with them first, whether you're becoming closer with a coworker or dating someone new.^[4] Making people prove themselves to you instead of believing them at face value is a sign of strong critical thinking.

- Try to see things from the other person's perspective to identify their possible intentions. Ask yourself these questions: Why are they in such a rush for a commitment? What do they have to gain? How well do I know them?
- People who are gullible tend to trust anyone who gives them information, especially if they consider that person to be older and wiser. However, don't let a person's age or authority sway you into believing something that isn't true. Remember that people of any age have to prove themselves to you first.
- If you're too trusting right away, then people are likely to take advantage of you and to trick you into doing something that's not really good for you.



4 Don't jump to conclusions. If you want to not be gullible, then don't let yourself jump to conclusions before having all of the facts yet. Just because your teacher missed a day of school, don't believe that they're fired just because that's what your best friend is saying. Just because your boss is being extra nice to you this week, don't assume it means you'll be getting a promotion soon. Make sure you have time to gather all of the information you need before you make hasty assumptions.

- People who are gullible sometimes don't want to take the time to figure out whether something is true or not. However, this is exactly what you should do if you want to avoid falling into a trap.



5 Avoid anything that sounds too good to be true. The fact of the matter is that if something sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. Whether a Prince Charming type you just met is trying to sweep you off your feet or your friend is asking you to invest in a business that is “guaranteed” to make you rich, you should always hesitate before you enter a situation that sounds like it will make all of your problems go away. If you feel like you’ve encountered the most perfect opportunity in the world, then chances are that there’s a catch.

- Remember the truth of the statement, “There’s no such thing as a free lunch.” If you’re offered an amazing opportunity, then there’s probably something you have to do in return. No one wants to just give you a chunk of money, an amazing gift, or a piece of property without wanting something in return.
- Ask yourself, how will this opportunity benefit the other person? If someone is offering you a gift certificate, what would be the incentive? Would the person really be doing this out of the goodness of their heart?



6 Know that there's some evolutionary good in being gullible. Though it's admirable to work to be less gullible, you should know that being gullible isn't all bad. In fact, the ethologist Richard Dawkins maintains that being gullible actually helps us survive as children. It's gullibility that makes you believe your parents when they tell you that you shouldn't leave the house because there are scary people outside, or when they say that you shouldn't wander into the woods because of monsters. This kind of thinking does keep you alive—to a point.^[5]

- This doesn't mean you should continue to be gullible, but that you shouldn't be frustrated with yourself for being gullible, either. It's likely that your gullibility has helped you in more ways than you may know.



7 Don't think anecdotal evidence always proves the truth. People who are gullible tend to hear one story about a certain phenomenon and then believe that it proves a larger truth. Don't make hasty generalizations just because of a story you heard, and sharpen your critical thinking skills by learning as much as you can about the situation before deciding. Though stories can help you can a better understanding of a situation and can give statistics and big issues a more human context, they can't be your only source of information.^[6]

- For example, if your friend says, "Don't get a Volvo. My cousin has a Volvo, and she says it's always breaking down on her. Get a Jetta instead," then this may be stating a truth about one person's experiences with a Volvo, but it doesn't mean it's true for all Volvos.



1 Consider the credibility of the source. Gaining as much information as you can about a certain situation can help you become less gullible. One way to do this is to consider the credibility of the source that you are getting information from. Whether you're reading a news headline or talking to a notorious gossip, ask yourself whether this source is peer-reviewed or well respected, or whether this person has misled you before. You can't believe everything you hear or everything you read on the Internet, or you'll become one of those people who believes a headline from The Onion.^[7]

- If you're reading a piece of news online, check out where it's coming from. Read about the journal or magazine and see how long it's been around, who contributes to it, and whether it's a scholarly or well-respected source.
- See if the source is an authority on the subject. If your cousin is trying to tell you all about which car to get but he doesn't even have a driver's license, then consider the possibility that he may not know what he's talking about.



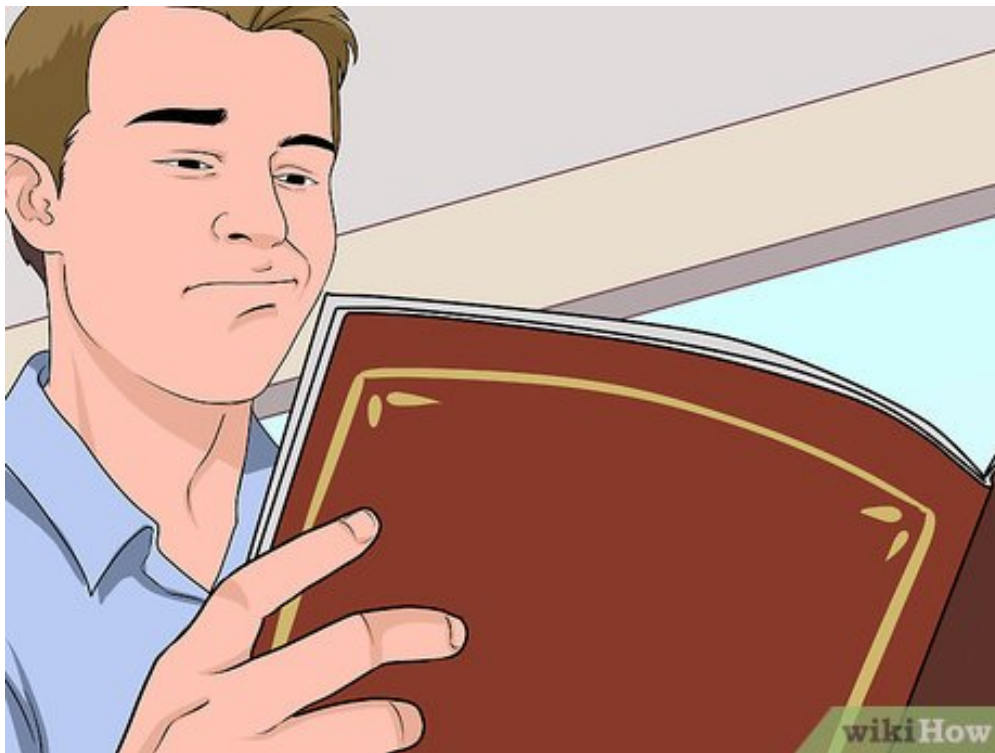
2 Search for evidence. Before you believe something or make a decision, make sure you have done ample searching for evidence to back it up. Don't just believe something because your friend told you it's true, but spend time researching the situation on reliable sources on the Internet, checking it out at your local library, or talking to experts in the field to find out whether it's true. People who are gullible are often also lazy, because they feel that it's less work to simply believe what they are told instead of making an effort to investigate the matter on their own.

- If you're looking for the truth about a scholarly matter, then make sure you're reading a peer-reviewed journal, so you know that the source has been approved as credible. You don't want to get scholarly information on someone's personal blog, unless that person is a respected scholar.
- The library is under appreciated as a source of information today. If you want to use it but feel shy about it, just talk to the librarian about how you can search for information.



3 Admit you don't know everything. Another way to be less gullible is to come to terms with the fact that you, along with every other person on this planet, have a lot more to learn. If you act like you know everything and simply accept everything that you are told or that you read, then you'll be continuing to live a life without challenging your own beliefs. Instead, admitting that you don't know a lot about politics, for example, can help you see that your cousin's oversimplified argument about Obama may not be as convincing as it sounds, at first.

- It's humbling to admit you don't know everything there is to know. This is the first step to becoming a more critical thinker and to understanding that arguments are often more complicated than they seem, or more complicated than you may give them credit for.
- While you should admit you don't know everything to yourself, you don't have to be eager to offer this information to others. For example, if you're buying a car, you don't want to tell the salesperson, "I don't know anything about cars..." or you're making it much more likely that people will take advantage of you.



4 Read more. People who seek information are always reading and learning more. They don't just get their news from one source, and they don't just read books by the same three authors, either. They are always on the hunt for new knowledge, whether they are reading the latest Jonathan Franzen novel or *Scientific American*. They are never satisfied, because they know there's more out there than meets the eye, and they are always determined to find it.

- Carve out a chunk of time every day, or at least every week, to do some reading. You can be systematic about it and get determined to understand everything there is to know about geology or contemporary poetry, or you can just read whatever piques your interest that week. The most important thing is that you develop a thirst for knowledge and continue to question the world around you.
- If people know you are knowledgeable and well-read, they will be less likely to try to trick you or to get you to fall into a trap.



- 5 Don't be afraid to ask questions.** If you want to be less gullible, then one thing you can do is ask as many questions as you need to fully understand a situation. Whether you're considering buying a new car or a home, or your older sibling is telling you the best way to bleach your hair, it's important to gather as much information as you can before making a decision or agreeing to see something a certain way. Many people are afraid to ask questions because they don't want to admit that they don't know something, but this is the best way to keep yourself from being gullible and buying in to something too easily.
- Plus, if you're the kind of person who is known for asking questions, then people will be less likely to try to trick or scam you.
 - If you're in class, then asking a million questions may derail the teacher a bit. Just ask what you really need to know right then and talk to the teacher after class if you have further questions.



6 Ask for a second opinion — and a third. If you really want to think critically and investigate situations thoroughly, then you should avoid getting all of your information or opinions from one source. Sure, your friend or cousin might have almost sold you on the best way to bake apple pie or mow your lawn, but you're better off asking another person what they think or looking up the issue or story online. If you've only heard a "fact" from one person, then you're much more likely to get tricked than if you ask more people what they think.

- The same goes for reading your news. Try not to get all of your news from one source or your thinking is likely to be biased. Read at least 2-3 news sources so you don't fall for any tricks or believe something that isn't entirely true.
- The internet can be a great resource for asking questions. You can use interactive forums to get feedback from a lot of different people. For example, you can ask you questions on Reddit's "Ask Reddit" forum, which will gain you responses from a variety of people from different backgrounds.

Part 3 of 3: Avoiding Scams or Tricks



1 Say no—it is OK not to be "nice". Gullible people are too polite or nice to simply say no. People are taught to not hurt others' feelings, and saying firmly "no" is somehow rude. People are also taught to generally trust, and that saying "no" may indicate distrust. However, it is perfectly proper and polite to decline something that you do not want, especially from a salesperson or someone you do not know.^[8]

- People can use the desire to be seen as "nice" by insinuating one is rude or mean for saying "no". This is especially true of predatory men trying to convince women to get involved with them.
- If something does not feel right to you, it is better to be cautious than to get scammed.
- Of course, you don't want to be paranoid, thinking that any time someone talks to you, that there's a potential they're going to scam you. Still, if you've been called gullible before, it's better to be cautious than sorry.
- If someone is trying to sell you something, then you should especially be wary of saying yes. Ask yourself if you actually want the product, and if it really sounds like a good deal, or if you're just afraid to say no because you feel sorry for the person.



2 Don't listen to gossip or rumors. If you want to not be gullible, then you should stop buying into any rumors or gossip, whether they are about Kim Kardashian or the most popular kid at your school. Unless you get them from a real source, chances are that gossip or rumors are just caused by jealous, bored, or mean people, and there's usually no truth in them. Get in the habit of thinking of all the reasons a piece of gossip is probably not true instead of immediately buying into it.

- Think about it: if someone started a rumor about you, then you wouldn't want everyone to instantly believe it, would you? Work on being less gullible and assuming that most gossip is just gossip and nothing more.
- If you have a reputation for believing everything you hear, then people may want to trick you with completely false gossip just to tease you.



3 Be skeptical of anyone who has fooled you. Whether your older sibling, annoying friend, or goofy neighbor has fooled you before, you need to proceed with caution when it comes to that person giving you more “information.” Even if the person does it in harmless fun, you should still be wary of the fact that this person will likely try to tease you again in the future. If the person really likes to trick you, then they’ll probably do it in front of an audience, so you should especially have your guard up if your older brother has his five best friends over and is trying to tell you something with a big smirk on his face.

- Remember that it can take a while to rebuild trust. If the person has tricked you before, then you shouldn’t trust them again, right away.
- If the person is clearly trying to get you to buy into something absurd, just roll your eyes and say, “Ha-ha, very funny,” to show that you won’t be fooled again.



4 Avoid email scams. As a general rule, anyone who emails you asking for money, saying they're your long-lost relative, or telling you that you need to click on a link to redeem your \$10,000 certificate, is just hoping you're gullible enough to fall for this trick. If you see anything like that in your junk mail folder, then delete it immediately and don't be fooled. Some people will try to tell you sad stories about themselves while trying to ask for money, but you can't be naive enough to fall for these tricks over email.^[9]

- If you get email about cash prizes you won for contests you didn't apply for, then send them straight to the trash. Everyone wants to believe that there's a ton of unclaimed money with their name floating around on it, but we're rarely so lucky.



5 Learn to disengage from salespeople. Another way gullible people get tricked is because they get sucked in when they're talking to salespeople, whether the person has called their house or approached them inside the mall. You have to learn to be polite but firm, to thank the person but to say you're not interested, and to avoid signing up for any email lists or revealing any personal information, such as your email address or phone number. Act like you've got places to go and that you have no time to listen, and that you're a person who won't be easily fooled.

- Though salespeople don't inherently try to trick you or scam you, you are much more likely to get tricked if you're completely ready to listen and if you let people talk to you about products you've had no interest in buying.



6 Learn to read a person's expression. Paying attention to a person's expression and body language can help you see whether they're just trying to fool you. If the person is quietly smirking, looking away, or even telling you something a little too eagerly, then they may be fooling you. If the person sounds serious, but when they look away, you think they're trying to keep themselves from laughing, then you're probably being tricked. If the person is telling you something but they can't look into your eyes, then you may not be getting the truth.

- Another way you can tell if a person is lying to you is to listen to how confident their voice sounds. Though some crooks have their words down to an art, the less experienced ones may mumble, or say "uh" and "um" a lot when they try to tell you something that is blatantly false.
- See how the person reacts when you ask a question. If they're lying to you, then they'll be much more likely to look scared or caught off guard.



7 Be wary on April 1st. Ah, April Fool's Day. The worst day on earth to be a gullible person. When you wake up on this fine day, your best bet is just to assume that everyone is out to trick you or to get you to believe something ridiculous. Listen to what your friends, siblings, or even your teachers say with your thinking cap on, and make sure you don't take anything at face value on this particular day. Though it's likely most people aren't out to get you, you don't want someone to shout, "April Fool's!" and make you feel embarrassed for falling for such a silly trick.

- Be especially careful when you read the news on this day. A lot of newspapers like to run fake stories on this day, so don't be the person who posts a fake news story on Facebook or emails it to their friends without realizing they've been fooled.
- On this day, practice turning the tables on the people who called you gullible and tricking them, instead!



Community Q&A

Question

One of my friends called me dumb because I didn't know a joke and everyone else did. Was I expected to know this joke? What should I do?



Community Answer

First of all, that "friend" is wrong. Just because you don't know a particular joke doesn't mean you're dumb. If you come across it again, fake a laugh, memorize the joke, and look the joke up online.

Helpful 20 Not Helpful 2

Understand Some "Facts of Life"

1. Being naive and innocent will not protect you from those who would take advantage of you. If you are young or particularly sheltered, it is always a good idea to check with someone wiser before making any big decisions.
2. There is no such thing as "easy money". Anyone who tells you they have a plan to

transform your money into a quick, lucrative profit is likely not telling you the whole truth. And very likely, if things go badly you will not get your money back. Investing can yield amazing results, but the more risky the investment, the more likely you will lose.

3. Be careful who you give your heart to. Unfortunately, there are people out there who will use you, who will betray you and cheat on you. People of all genders are vulnerable.

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