

***Spot the Half-Truth  
Ad Detective Checklist***

# Spot the Half-Truth Ad Detective Checklist

A half-truth (or incomplete claim) sounds like a fact, but you can't check it as stated: it leaves out, blurs, or only hints at the part that matters.

**Our example ad:** *Top Breeze ceiling fans move a lot more air than the top brand, and on top of that are quieter!*

It sounds good. Should you buy one? Not yet. Run the 6 checks first.

## 1 What's missing?

Name what the ad left out (settings, time frame, sample size, side effects, price basis).

*Top Breeze:* At which speed? Maybe Top Breeze was on its top speed and the other fan was on its second-to-top speed.

## 2 Compared to what?

Ask which product, which settings, and which conditions the claim is better than.

*Top Breeze:* "Quieter." Quieter than what? The ad never says.

## 3 Vague words?

Flag soft claims like "a lot more," "leading," or "studies show," and ask what exact number or name would make them testable.

*Top Breeze:* How much is "a lot more" air? And which brand is "the top brand"?

## 4 Implied vs stated?

Separate what the ad literally says from what a hurried reader assumes.

*Top Breeze:* The ad never says it's quieter than the top brand. You fill that in yourself, and that's exactly what the ad wants.

## 5 Who ran the study?

Independent lab or advertiser-funded, what was tested, and what was reported vs withheld.

*Top Breeze:* “Studies show...” An independent testing lab, or Top Breeze’s own employees at Top Breeze’s own facilities?

## 6 Tentative until proven?

Treat the claim as unproven until 1–5 have answers.

*Top Breeze:* Until you know the speeds, the other brand, and who did the testing, the claim only sounds good. Don’t buy the story the ad wants you to fill in.

**No fair comparison → no trust yet.**

### How to use this

- **In class (10-minute bell-ringer):** Show one ad from page 3. Students say what it wants them to assume and which check catches it.
- **Homework (find a real ad):** Bring in a real ad from TV, a website, a cereal box, or a billboard, and run all 6 checks on it.
- **At home (Ad Trace):** Pick an ad together, trace its source (who is making this claim?), and compare it to one fact from somewhere else. 10 minutes.

Free from Thought Academy · [thoughtacademy.com/critical-thinking/half-truth-checklist-printable/](https://thoughtacademy.com/critical-thinking/half-truth-checklist-printable/) · Free to print and share for classroom and home use.

## Practice worksheet

### Ad Detective Practice

#### Investigate 5 ads

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Read each ad. Write what the ad actually says, then what it wants you to assume. Then write the number of the check (1–6) from the checklist that catches it. Most ads get caught by more than one check.

*All the ads and brands on this page are made up for practice.*

#### Ad A: Top Breeze ceiling fan

| *Top Breeze: the quiet way to cool your room. Now with more power than ever!*

What it says | What it wants you to assume

\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

Which check catches it? # \_\_\_\_ # \_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Ad B: Sparkle Pals toy

| *Sparkle Pals: hours of magic fun! Kids love them!*

What it says | What it wants you to assume

\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

Which check catches it? #\_\_\_\_ #\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

### Ad C: Sunny Crunch snack bars

| *Studies show kids who eat breakfast do better in school. Start their day with Sunny Crunch!*

What it says | What it wants you to assume

\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

Which check catches it? #\_\_\_\_ #\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

### Ad D: Brainy Bunny math app

| *Brainy Bunny: the #1 choice of families!*

What it says | What it wants you to assume

\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

Which check catches it? #\_\_\_\_ #\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

### Ad E: Big Barn store sale

| *MEGA SALE! Save up to 70% on everything!*

What it says | What it wants you to assume

\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

Which check catches it? #\_\_\_\_ #\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**Your turn:** Find a real ad. Write down one claim it makes:

\_\_\_\_\_

What does it want you to assume? \_\_\_\_\_ Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Free from Thought Academy · [thoughtacademy.com/critical-thinking/half-truth-checklist-printable/](http://thoughtacademy.com/critical-thinking/half-truth-checklist-printable/) · Free to print and share for classroom and home use.

**Answer key:**

Other answers can be right too, as long as students can explain them.

**Ad A:** Says it's "the quiet way" and has "more power than ever." Wants you to assume it's quieter and stronger than other fans. Checks **2, 4, 3**.

**Ad B:** Says "hours of magic fun" and "kids love them." Wants you to assume your child will play for hours and that many kids tried it. Checks **3, 1, 5**.

**Ad C:** Says studies show kids who eat breakfast do better in school. Wants you to assume Sunny Crunch causes that. Checks **4,5** (the study is about breakfast, not the bar).

**Ad D:** Says "#1 choice of families." Wants you to assume most families pick it because it's best. Checks **3, 2, 5**.

**Ad E:** Says "save up to 70%." Wants you to assume everything is 70% off. Checks **4, 1, 3**.

For every ad, check **6** applies too: until 1–5 have answers, don't trust the claim yet. No fair comparison → no trust yet.