

Who Even Knows Anymore: **check your reading.**

Six questions on one real news article. Each uses a different reading skill, from finding a fact to judging what to trust.

READ THIS FIRST

Bureau of Labor Statistics tells the US what's up with the economy: Trump firing its top official may undercut trust in its data

Thomas A. Stapleford, University of Notre Dame · The Conversation · August 8, 2025

<https://theconversation.com/bureau-of-labor-statistics-tells-the-us-whats-up-with-the-economy-trump-firing-its-top-official-may-undercut-trust-in-its-data-262673>



How to use it. Read the whole article first. Keep it open while you answer, the way you would at the kitchen table. The questions go roughly from easier to harder. The levels are a guide to how hard each kind of task is on the international adult literacy test, not a score. The answer key is on the last page.

DECODE LEVEL 1

1. Paragraph 19 says the commissioner's appointment is "at will." What does that mean?

LOCATE LEVEL 1 TO 2

2. When was the Bureau of Labor Statistics founded, and on what day was its commissioner fired?

RESTATE LEVEL 2

3. In one or two sentences of your own, what is the article's main point?

INFER LEVEL 3

4. Paragraph 5 says the numbers are routinely revised, and paragraphs 20 and 21 say a large civil-service staff produces them. What can you conclude about whether a big downward revision shows the numbers were rigged?

COMPARE LEVEL 3

5. Paragraphs 20 to 23 and 29 compare two kinds of risk. What are they, and which does the author think is more likely?

EVALUATE LEVEL 4 AND UP

6. Paragraph 15 says the Department of Labor disbanded its advisory committees, stating they “had fulfilled their intended purpose.” How would you check that quotation, and why does it matter?

Answer key

1. Decode. The president can legally remove the commissioner at any time, even though the job comes with a four-year term.

Where to look: Paragraphs 18 and 19

2. Locate. It was founded in 1884. The commissioner was fired on August 1, 2025, the same day a report showed weakness in the job market.

Where to look: Paragraphs 1 and 3

3. Restate. The BLS produces numbers the whole country relies on, and firing its head after a weak report could undercut trust in that data, even though one person could not simply fake the numbers. The bigger risk is that the data becomes less trusted and less useful.

Where to look: Paragraphs 2, 14, 20 and 29

4. Infer. A revision by itself is not evidence of rigging: revisions are normal, and no single official can change the numbers. The article never puts those two points together; you have to.

Where to look: Paragraphs 5, 20 and 21

5. Compare. One is outright faking of the numbers, which he calls very difficult and unlikely to fool economists. The other is shaping the data indirectly, by making it harder to get, cutting resources, closing data series, or nudging the methods, which could make the statistics much less useful. He worries more about the second.

Where to look: Paragraphs 20 to 23 and 29

6. Evaluate. Open the article the author links, look for a termination notice in the Federal Register, and check the BLS advisory committee page. Similar “fulfilled” wording may come from a different department’s notice about its own panels. Who said something matters as much as what was said, especially in a story about trust.

Where to look: Paragraph 15