

Three Lessons in Using Context Clues in Online Research

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Lesson 1: The Case of Two Derek Lowes

In *The Joy of Search* (<https://amzn.to/3pCwSRa>) Daniel Russell reminds readers that sometimes you have to provide your own context for the information you find online. Additionally, he provides many reminders to question things that don't seem congruent with what you already know about a topic. I implemented both of these ideas when I read that former Major League Baseball player Derek Lowe writes a blog on Science.org. How I came across that tidbit is the result of going down a rabbit hole on Wikipedia.

On the morning of December 7, 2021 I was reading a thread about the 2021 Baseball Hall of Fame selections on the Sons of Sam Horn (<https://sonsofsamhorn.net/index.php>) message board (yes, there are some of us who still use message boards). Someone mentioned a retired pitcher, David Cone, which somehow reminded me of Derek Lowe who pitched for the Red Sox from 1997 through 2004. That prompted me to do a quick Google search to see what Derek Lowe is doing these days. As is often the case with retired professional athletes, a Wikipedia page was a top result.

As I got to the bottom of the Wikipedia page about Derek Lowe, the retired baseball player, I found an interesting sentence that didn't seem like it could be accurate. It read, *“Derek Lowe currently has a blog hosted under the peer-reviewed scientific journal, Science, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.”*

Lowe officially announced his retirement July 18, 2013.^[28]

Lowe was eligible to be elected into the Hall of Fame in 2019, but received less than 5% of the vote and became ineligible for the 2020 ballot.

Scouting report [edit]

Lowe was a sinkerball pitcher, throwing the pitch over 60% of the time. He also threw a fastball, curveball and a slider.

Personal life [edit]

Lowe has advocated for various causes to fight cancer. Himself a survivor of squamous cell carcinoma,^[31] Lowe has worked with the Melanoma Foundation of New England,^[32] the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention,^[33] and The Prostate Cancer Foundation.^[34] Lowe was diagnosed with cancer in 2008 and received permission to return to baseball in 2009, but was subsequently banned by Major League Baseball.^[35]

Lowe was charged with fourth-degree domestic violence by King County police in 1997 after his girlfriend claimed that he struck her. Lowe was released on \$1,000 bond the next day, and he allegedly violated a no-contact order by returning to her home shortly after his release.^[36] Lowe entered counseling as a result.^[37]

Carolyn Hughes, who covered the Dodgers for Fox Sports West, was suspended pending an investigation into a potential relationship between her and Lowe during his tenure with the Dodgers. Shortly thereafter, Lowe filed for divorce from Trinka Lowe, his wife of seven years, with whom he fathered three children.^[38] Hughes's husband had also filed for divorce. In the aftermath, Hughes ended her broadcasting career and she and Lowe continued their relationship. They were married on December 13, 2008 at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan.^[39]

On April 28, 2011, Lowe was arrested and charged with driving under the influence, reckless driving, and improper lane change after he was spotted drag racing down an Atlanta street with another car. The trooper who stopped him detected an odor of alcohol and administered a field sobriety test, which resulted in Lowe's arrest. Lowe declined to take a breath test before he was released after posting bail. The other driver was not charged with any offense and was released.^[40] On May 26, 2011, both the DUI charge and the reckless driving charge were dismissed by City of Atlanta Solicitor-General Raines Carter, and Lowe entered a nolo contendere (no contest) plea to violating basic motor vehicle code.^[41]

Lowe finished second to Mark Mulder in the July 2017 American Century Championship, his celebrity golf tournament.^[42]

Derek Lowe currently has a blog hosted under the peer-reviewed scientific journal Science published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

See also [edit]

- List of Major League Baseball annual saves leaders
- List of Major League Baseball annual wins leaders
- List of Major League Baseball no-hitters

References [edit]

- ↑ *abcdefg* "Baseball the right choice for Lowe". Sports.espn.go.com. March 11, 2003. Retrieved August 13, 2012.
- ↑ "Mariners on Cruz control". *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*.
- ↑ Beck, Jason (October 31, 2011). "Tribu acquires veteran Lowe from Braves". *MLB.com*. Archived from the original on November 2, 2011. Retrieved October 31, 2011.
- ↑ Kevin Sipe, Bleacher Report, Derek Lowe: How the Atlanta Braves Pitcher Went From Has-Been to Ace, April 8, 2011
- ↑ "Lowe now 'nose' to use sunscreen | redsox.com: News".

My initial reaction to reading that was, "that can't be true!" There were a few context clues that triggered that response from me. First, in my memory Derek Lowe, the baseball player, had a bit of a reputation in the media as a meathead when he played in Boston. Second, the beginning of the Wikipedia entry about him states that he skipped college to play baseball. Third, nothing in the Wikipedia entry mentions anything about science or Derek Lowe going back to school after retirement.

To fact-check the Wikipedia entry I turned to Google and searched "Derek Lowe blog." Sure enough, I found the Science.org blog written by Derek Lowe (<https://www.science.org/blogs/pipeline>). But it's not the same Derek Lowe. The picture and the bio of Derek Lowe, the scientist, don't match those of the baseball player at all. Oh, and the blog is not peer-reviewed, but it is interesting.



...work does end up being a... approaches... back down the... the...
"unlikely to do any good" category, it'll be (at first glance) a loss. But if the microbiome idea really is wrong, then the real loss would be continuing to put time, money, and resources into it that could go to things with a better chance of working. This new paper finishes up with a call for people to replicate its results, and that's exactly what needs to be done. Ideally, we'd do that before continuing with more autism/microbiome work in general, but that's unlikely. But this hypothesis has a lot of issues to deal with, and the field will do itself - and autism patient, and their families - no favors by not dealing with them as soon as possible.

Yes, but not that Derek Lowe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Derek Lowe

Derek Lowe, an Arkansan by birth, got his BA from Hendrix College and his PhD in organic chemistry from Duke before spending time in Germany on a Humboldt Fellowship on his post-doc. He's worked for several major pharmaceutical companies since 1989 on drug...

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COMMENTS

Over the years I've had many students who love professional sports and will spout off any little "fun fact" about a favorite athlete no matter how ridiculous it seems to be. This example with the case of two Derek Lowes could be a good way to reach those students to help them understand how to use their own knowledge and context clues together to fact-check their "fun facts" about their favorite athletes.

Lesson #2: Unraveling an Email and Copyright Scam

For many years I've been teaching students and teachers about the importance of respecting copyright. So when an email with the subject line "DMCA Copyright Infringement Notice" landed in my inbox, I immediately opened it. It turned out to be the second attempt by the same person to scam/ threaten me into linking to a website.

The basics of the scam are this: a person (sometimes claiming to be a lawyer) emails you to say that you are using an image in violation of their copyright or that of someone they represent. They then say that you have to link to a particular website within seven days or they will pursue some kind of legal action. The reason they're doing this is to try to get backlinks to their website in an attempt to boost their search engine ranking. MOZ has a good article (<https://moz.com/learn/seo/backlinks>) about what backlinks are and why they matter in search engine rankings.

How I Figured Out Was a Scam

If you don't want to read about it, I made a video about this particular case. You can watch the video here https://youtu.be/KE7_sPrzF6w

There were a few fairly obvious signs in the email that it wasn't actually sent by a real attorney or even a real law firm. Give a copy of the text of the email (included below) and see if they can spot the signs that this wasn't sent from a real attorney or law firm.

Dear owner of <https://www.freetech4teachers.com/search/label/Spelling>,

My name is Sarah Perkins, I am a Trademark Attorney of Arthur Davidson Legal Services.

I am reaching out to you as your website features content that has infringed on one copyright image owned by our client, Wooden Earth Ltd.

The use of this image - <https://i.imgur.com/ADzFgKD.png> is featured on your web page - (<https://www.freetech4teachers.com/search/label/Spelling>), without proper image credit attribution.

The Wayback Machine - <https://web.archive.org/>, a permanent public archive of the web, shows the image being used on your website.

Our client, is happy for their image to be used and shared across the internet. However, proper image credit is due for past or ongoing usage.

The image credit to Wooden Earth Ltd must be added underneath the image or somewhere appropriate on the offending page with a link to <https://www.woodenearth.com/> within 7 days. Otherwise, we are required to take legal action.

I have assigned case ID #8824 to track this dispute, which should be quoted in all correspondence. Once you have added an image credit to the page, the case against you will be dropped.

This letter is an official notification under Section 512(c) of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act ("DMCA"). If this is unresolved immediately we'll have to proceed with filing a DMCA legal case.

I am providing this notice with authority to act on behalf of the owner of the copyright(s) involved.

Regards

Sarah Perkins
Trademark Attorney

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The first hint that the email probably isn't from a real attorney is in how it's addressed. Would a real attorney send an email that is generically addressed to "Dear owner of website X?" I don't think so.

Next, take a look at the URL that the person provided for FreeTech4Teachers.com. They didn't provide a URL for a specific page. Instead they linked to a label used for categorizing things on FreeTech4Teachers.com. That URL leads to hundreds of blog posts! An attorney sending a legal notice would be specific about where the infringement was found.

The image that they claim is being used without attribution is one that they found at <https://i.imgur.com/ADzFgKD.png> (Imgur provides free hosting for images) and doesn't have any information regarding ownership. Additionally, a quick reverse image search will reveal that the exact same image is found on many other websites including Pixabay with a statement that it is free to use and reuse without attribution. On a related note here are some methods for conducting reverse image searches
<https://practicaledtech.com/2022/03/01/five-reverse-image-search-strategies-students-should-know/>

Finally, the resolution that this attorney proposes is to simply add a link to a website. If I was hiring an intellectual property attorney to pursue legal action about my copyright, I'd want a little more in return for my expensive efforts.

Even after all of those red flags I still wanted to make sure that I was right about my hunch that this was a scam. That's where "Sarah's" signature line comes in handy. I simply opened a new browser tab and did a quick search for the law firm (I didn't want to click the link in her signature for fear of it redirecting me somewhere weird or worse). That took me to <https://arthurdavidson.com/> where I did confirm that there is a Sarah Perkins listed on the site. However, the site seemed very poorly constructed and not likely to be something that a Boston-based law firm would be proud of.

On the website there's an address listed. I did a quick Google search for the address and found that it's just a coworking space in Boston. It seemed odd that a law firm who lists eight very experienced attorneys would be working out of a relatively small coworking space. That information gave me even more confirmation that this was probably a scam email.

The last clue that this email was a scam and not from a real attorney came when I headed to the Massachusetts Board of Bar Overseers website (<https://www.massbbo.org/s/>) to look up whether or not there was a Sarah Perkins admitted to the Bar in Massachusetts. The only Sarah Perkins listed is listed as inactive and without malpractice insurance. I looked up another of the attorneys (Raymond Porter) listed on the Arthur Davidson website and he isn't even in the Massachusetts Board of Bar Overseers' database. My guess is that whoever is running this scam got lucky in picking the name Sarah Perkins or perhaps looked up an inactive name in the database and used it figuring they'd never get caught.

Lesson 3: What Car is in Front of the Lyon's Den?

A fun and effective way to encourage students to use academic databases and digital archives is to have them solve search challenges that are based upon items found in the digital archive or academic database of your choosing. Here is an example of a search challenge that I created for students studying local history in Maine.

The Prompt: Everyone knows that Hannibal Hamlin (Abraham Lincoln's first Vice President) lived on Paris Hill in Maine. What you might not know is that Paris Hill was the home of another person who participated in a notable first.

Your challenge has three parts:

- Identify the significance of the airplane pictured below.
- What is the connection between the airplane and Paris Hill?
- Find out what kind of car was driven by the person who represents the connection between the airplane and Paris Hill.

Hints:

- Make or find a list of all of the people who flew on this airplane.
- Utilize resources on the [Maine Memory Network](#) website to attempt to identify the type of car driven by the person who represents the connection between the airplane and Paris Hill.



The Answers to the Challenge:

There are a few ways to arrive at the answers. What I've outlined below is the most direct way to get to the answers and they all require students to pay attention to the context of where each piece of the mystery is found.

Step 1: Identify the airplane and its historical significance.

The image itself gives us a big hint. Do a quick Google search for "southern cross airplane" and the top result will be a Wikipedia page about the airplane. It's important to include "airplane" in the search because searching Google for just "southern cross" will put a music video of the Crosby, Stills, and Nash song Southern Cross at the top of the results. Further down the search results page for "southern cross" you'll find links to articles about the constellation of the same name, links to an energy company, and links to a Brazilian award for chivalry. In fact, you won't see any reference to an airplane in the first ten pages of Google search results when searching "southern cross."

Furthermore, "southern cross airplane" isn't even a term that Google suggests when you enter "southern cross."

As mentioned above, the top Google search result for “southern cross airplane” is the [Wikipedia page about the airplane](#). Read through that page and you’ll learn that it was the first aircraft to be flown from the United States to Australia.

Step 2: Identify who flew on the airplane.

Also on that same Wikipedia page you’ll learn that the four members of the flight crew were Charles Kingsford Smith, Charles Ulm, Harry Lyon, and James Warner.

Once you’ve identified who the members of the flight crew were, the next step is to figure out which one had a connection to Maine. To do this, open the Wikipedia page for each member of the flight crew then use keyboard commands of **CTRL+F** (Windows computers) or **COMMAND+F** (Mac computers) to search each page for the word “Maine.” Only the pages for Charles Kingsford Smith and Harry Lyon include a match for “Maine” and the match on Smith’s page is only found in the context of the word “remained.” Lyon’s page includes “Maine” as part of a link to the [Maine Memory Network’s](#) website (<http://mainememory.net/>) which is mentioned in the hints for this challenge.

Step 3: Find the reference to Paris Hill.

If you follow the link to the Maine Memory Network from the Wikipedia page about Harry Lyon, you’ll find a fairly long article about Lyon and his life including that his parents bought a house on Paris Hill and Lyon later lived there.

Alternatively, you could have followed the hint about using the Maine Memory Network’s website then headed there to do a search within the site for references to Harry Lyon.

Step 4: Find the reference to a car.

At the very bottom of [this Maine Memory Network page](#) (https://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/272/page/531/display?use_mmn=1) about Harry Lyon you’ll see a picture of Lyon sitting in a car in his driveway in 1927. (The image is copyrighted so you’ll have to view it there).

Step 5: Identify the car.

This is the hardest part of the whole challenge. To do this you’ll want to enlarge the picture found on the Maine Memory Network’s article about Lyon. Fortunately, they provide a [zoomable version of the image](#) (<https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/25464?popup=1>). By zooming in on the image you can look at some important details including the shape of the front door on the car, the shape of the front of the car, and a little badge on the front of the car.

At this point the process becomes a little bit of guesswork followed by a process of comparison and elimination. There are some points to consider before guessing at what kind of car is in the picture. Here's a list of those points to consider: First, the picture was taken in 1927, a year before the flight of the Southern Cross. From reading about him, we know that Lyon was not a man of exceptional wealth, but probably middle to upper-middle class. Based on Lyon's financial standing as well as looking at the details of the car we can probably remove luxury brands from our guesswork.

When we zoom-in on the car we can see that it has some imperfections as the result of driving and or post-manufacturing modification. Notable, there are what appears to be two wooden bench seats behind the driver's seat. The back half of the body appears to be wooden as well.

Now that we've considered the points above we can start guessing at the manufacturer of the car and the production year. Noting that cars didn't significantly change from one model year to the next at this time, if they did at all, we're guessing the year according to decade or half-decade is a viable approach to this challenge. At this point, turning to Google Image search is our next step. A search for "1920s cars" or "1910s cars" is a starting place. However, those results generally feature examples of luxury cars of the time. We're looking for cars that could have been owned by middle to upper-middle class people of the time. At this point in the process it's helpful to have a list of American car manufacturers of the 1910s and 1920s. Again, we may turn to Wikipedia for such a list or to any number of antique car websites for such a list.

Based on the lists of American car manufacturers and what we know about Lyon, Ford is the most common guess as it was the most popular brand in the United States at the time and is still in the forefront of Americans' minds today when they think of automobile manufacturers. Some adults will still think of Studebaker as an American car manufacturer. Dodge is also a common guess as it satisfies both the price and popularity components of our quest. So now it's a matter of comparing pictures of cars produced by those manufacturers during the 1910s and early 1920s.

Use Google Images to find images of Ford, Studebaker, and Dodge cars produced in those decades. Compare the pictures closely to those of the picture of Lyon sitting in his car and you'll start to notice that the shape of the door in his car doesn't match those of Ford and Studebaker (they're not as rounded at the bottom). The front of Lyon's vehicle is also more rounded than that of the Fords and Studebakers made at the same time. A final detail is on the hood of the car when we look at the radiator caps of the vehicles. In all three cases, the Dodge examples are consistent with what we see in the picture of Lyon in his car. **The final answer is a Dodge Touring car produced around 1919** (give or take a year) that was modified in the back.

Disclosure: *I spent at least ten hours comparing images of cars to the one of Lyon sitting in his car. To verify my information about the car I enlisted the help of one the top antique car preservationists in the country, Jeff Orwig. Jeff is a friend of mine and the curator of Bob Bahre's exquisite car collection housed on Paris Hill in Paris, Maine. You can [read more about the collection here](#).*