

# Is it fake news?

Guidelines to help you assess news sources and sharpen your media literacy skills

## 1 Know the origin story

- **Who said it?** Is the author credible? What else has this author written? What is their area of expertise?
- **Where did it come from?** Was it peer-reviewed and included in a scholarly publication? Does the website or news source support a particular point of view? Is it self-published?

### Tips

- Check the URL:** Does it look “off?” Does it mimic the URL of a real news site (nytimes.net instead of nytimes.com)?
- Read the About Us and Disclaimer:** Research further on the authors and source.
- Perform a reverse image search:** Enter any images into a free online reverse image search and see where else they have been used.

## 2 Look at the date

- **When was the story published?** Is it recent or old? Have there been any updates or rebuttals since publication?
- **If the story is old, why is it being rehashed?** Is it connected to a current news story in a meaningful way?

### Tips

- Check the date:** If there is no date listed, find another source.
- Look for the latest editions:** If you’re doing academic research, look for the most recent sources you can find.

## 3 Find out the who and why

- **What is the purpose of the story?** Does it fulfill a mission for the author or publication? Is it to inform and educate? Incite an emotion? Persuade?
- **Who is the story meant for?** Is the audience the average person? Academics? Students? A political or religious audience?

### Tips

- Look for opinions:** Credible news sources will clearly mark their opinion pieces.
- Beware of ads disguised as stories:** “Advertorials” are ads that are written as editorial stories. Many clickbait stories are also covers for gimmicks and dubious products.

## What is “fake news?”

**Fake news** refers to articles and reports that are intentionally and verifiably false or misleading and are designed to manipulate how you view facts, events or statements.



You may also hear similar terms like *misinformation*, *disinformation*, *malinformation* and *partisan news*.

**Media literacy** is using critical thinking and analysis to evaluate messages in the media – and being thoughtful when creating your own media.

Fake news can be harmful because it can:

- Create confusion about important issues
- Intensify or suppress social conflict
- Spread misinformation about medical conditions and treatments
- Affect students’ grades
- Cause humiliation or damage business or personal reputation
- Put people in personal danger (doxxing)
- Cause financial issues

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## Types of fake news

**Misleading headlines:** out of context; sloppy reporting; often sound too good to be true; omits important details; plays on emotions or fears

**Clickbait:** outrageous headlines and photos, often touting miracle cures, celebrity news or memes; appeal to curiosity; sometimes appear in ad spaces

**Sloppy journalism:** not fact-checked; may rely on prediction; emphasizes speed over accuracy (BREAKING NEWS to beat the other media outlets)

**Satire/parody:** use humor, irony or ridicule to poke fun at real news sites; frequently written by humorists and comedians instead of reporters

**Bias:** presents opinion as fact; may downplay or leave out facts to present a certain point of view; may play to a specific audience

**Imposter content:** mimics legitimate news sources; may use logos or web addresses that look like the real thing; takes advantage of the reputation of established agencies

## 4 Check the sources

**Are sources cited in the story?** If not, can you verify the reliability of what is reported? Do they sufficiently support the story?

**Who are the sources and are they credible?** Can they be verified through a quick search? Were they quoted specifically for this story or are their quotes taken from a secondary source?

### Tips

- Click the links:** If a source link is provided, click it and verify the source is credible and the information in the original story is relayed accurately.
- Consult a fact-checking site:** The American Library Association has a list of credible, nonpartisan fact-checking sites at <https://libguides.ala.org/InformationEvaluation>

## 5 Look for a slant

**Does the author or publication represent a particular worldview?** Again, is it an opinion presented as fact? Is the author or publication pushing a point of view or appealing to an emotion?

**Is there something missing?** Is the whole story presented or are key pieces left out? Do you see words like “always,” “never” and other potentially biased language?

### Tips

- Consider satire:** If the story is just too silly or wild, it may be a joke – but truth can be stranger than fiction so research to be sure!
- Check yourself!:** Humans instinctively gravitate toward people and things that confirm their own beliefs. Be sure your own views aren't clouding your judgement.