



Fake News!

What is it?

Fake News refers to false information that is circulated as credible news, often with a hidden agenda. This term has recently been politicized to mean any information a person may disagree with, whether it is credible or not.

So how do we determine what true fake news is? And how do we protect ourselves from it?

Understanding the difference between dis and mis information and why fake news might be spread is a good starting point.

Why/How Does it Happen?

Both mis- and disinformation rely heavily on our online lifestyles. False content can spread like wildfire across social media platforms, and it takes a practiced eye to spot it.

False information may be spread to serve a purpose. Some people use disinformation to cause social division, or purposely lie to support their beliefs and further their narrative. This can be seen surrounding politics, marketing, and public figures.

The digital world encourages the spread of misinformation.

Social media algorithms reward engagement, not accuracy.

Information that catches peoples attention will spread, and benefit the person who posted it. Some social media users share false inflammatory information on purpose in order to make money.

Our social media platforms are also tailored to show us more of what we like. Once a person interacts with false information, more of the same will be suggested to them. This can make them feel like that false message is everywhere, and make the false information seem more legitimate. (Lin, 2024)

Tools to Spot and Combat Fake News!

Lateral Reading

The best way to fight misinformation online is to use **Lateral Reading**: an online information evaluation technique that involves leaving the current website you're on to open new tabs and search for information about the source's credibility, bias, and the context of the claims being made. Instead of reading an article from top to bottom (vertical reading), lateral reading encourages quickly switching between tabs to compare information and assess the trustworthiness of the original source by seeing what other trusted sources say about it. (News Literacy Project, 2025)

Fact Checking Sites

These sites allow you to search news stories, headlines and rumours. The site will provide a summary of the issue, a rating on the information (such as true, false, scam, satire, mixture, research in progress, etc.), and the sources it used to draw that conclusion.

- Snopes
- FactCheck.org
- Google Fact Check Explorer



Test your knowledge with the Media Smarts "Break the Fake" game!

Words to Know

Lateral Reading: Verifying information as you read it. This can be done by leaving the website and looking at other sites to make sure the original source is reliable and authentic.

Critical Observation: Using critical thinking to look more carefully at images and think about where those images were taken.

Reverse Image Search: A digital investigative technique used to find the original source of photographs.

Geolocation: Verifying the location of online information.

Misinformation: Information that is inadvertently incorrect and not intended to mislead people.

Disinformation: Information and the distribution of information that is deliberately incorrect or deceptive with the intention of spreading a false message.

Propaganda: Information with an agenda. Its intention is to persuade and will often contain an unnecessary positive spin.

Fake News: A term used to refer to information that is intentionally false. This term has been politicized to refer to information that one does not agree with, regardless of the validity of the information.

Fact-checking: The process of verifying information to determine its correctness.

Source: Calgary Public Library

Questions to ask when Teaching Media Literacy

Who created this?

Was it a company? Was it an individual? (If so, who?) Was it a comedian? Was it an artist? Was it an anonymous source? *Why do you think that?*

Why did they make it?

Was it to inform you of something that happened in the world (for example, a news story)? Was it to change your mind or behaviour (an opinion essay or a how-to)? Was it to make you laugh (a funny meme)? Was it to get you to buy something (an ad)? *Why do you think that?*

Who is the message for?

Is it for kids? Grown-ups? People who share a particular interest? *Why do you think that?*

What techniques are being used to make this message credible or believable?

Does it have statistics from a reputable source? Does it contain quotes from an expert? Does it have an authoritative-sounding voice-over? Is there direct evidence of the claims it's making? *Why do you think that?*

What details were left out, and why?

Is the information balanced with different views — or does it present only one side? Do you need more information to fully understand the message? *Why do you think that?*

How did the message make you feel?

Do you think others might feel the same way? Would everyone feel the same, or would certain people disagree with you? Why do you think that? Was this message intended to make you feel strongly? Why?

Source: Common Sense Media