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How To Spot Fake News

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"Fake news" used to be a relatively uncommon problem, but over the last decade, and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing consumption of news and articles has caused misinformation to run wild.

Far from a new concept, misinformation and cherry-picked stories have been used throughout history as a form of propaganda or information warfare. However, the rise of social media as a hub for sharing articles has spread "fake news"— false or misleading information presented as legitimate news—all over the internet.

Fueled further by increasing polarization, as well as the use of the term by former U.S. President Donald Trump to also refer to negative coverage (whether legitimate or misinformed), it seems more difficult than ever to separate trustworthy from misleading sources.

With this in mind, we combined guidance from non-profit journalism project First Draft News and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to create this guide for understanding "fake news" and how to spot it.

The Different Types of "Fake News"

In order to spot fake news, you have to know the many forms misinformation can take.

Not all fake news is created equal, or even with the intent to deceive. Some start as opinions or jokes that become misunderstood, twisted over time, and eventually turn into misinformation. Others begin with the sole purpose of deception.

Online Misinformation: From Least Intentional to Most

- **Satire/Parody**
  Articles or videos created to mock or laugh at an issue. If created without being an obvious parody, these types of articles can still fool readers and be shared as "real."
- **False Connection**
  Stories with headlines, visuals, and captions that don't support the content. Sometimes the cause is an honest mistake or poor journalism, but other times the false connections are deliberate to draw more attention.
- **Misleading Content**
  Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual, especially one not involved in the story. This can be caused by poor journalism or political influence, but is also caused by opinions being shared as news and the increasingly blurring line between the two.
- **False Context**
  Genuine content that is shared with false contextual information, such as an incorrect date or a misattributed quote. This type of misinformation can still appear on news sites with poor fact-checking or opinion-based reporting but is clearly driven by an agenda with an attempt to influence.
- **Imposter Content**
  When genuine sources are impersonated in order to deceive the audience. Though this type of misinformation is used in parody, it is also used for profit and propaganda purposes, such as by sites disguised to look like news organizations or using fake credentials.
- **Manipulated Content**
  The deliberate manipulation of information, such as digitally altering an image or making up quotes. This type of misinformation is easily proven fake with some research but can spread too far before it is fact-checked.
- **Fabricated Content**
  Newly created false content designed to deceive and do harm. These include deepfake videos and sites posing as legitimate news organisations.

Despite many types of misinformation appearing to be obvious at a glance, it's harder to discern when browsing online. In a 2019 global survey on social media by Ipsos, **44% of people** admitted to being duped by fake news at least once, while others may have been duped unwittingly.

How To Tell If An Article is "Fake News"

With many types of misinformation to contend with, and trust in media organisations falling in the U.S. and around the world, it might seem like you're surrounded by "fake news," but there are a few things you can check to be sure.

- **The Source**
  Investigate the site to make sure it's legitimate and check its mission and its contact info to understand if it's news, satire, or opinion.
- **The URL**
  Be wary of unusual top-level domain names, like ".com. co" that are designed to appear legitimate, such as ABCnews.com.co.
- **The Text**
  Does the article have spelling errors or dramatic punctuation? This can be an easy find for simple fabricated content, as most reputable sources have high proofreading and grammatical standards.
- **The Information**
  Read past click-baity headlines, note who is (or isn't) quoted, and verify the information on other sites. This is also a good way to separate opinion pieces from news.
- **The Author**
  Check the author's bio and do a quick search on them. Are they credible to write about their story? Are they real?
- **Supporting Sources**
  Click on the supporting links and perform reverse searches on images. Do they actually support the story, or are they irrelevant (or worse, manipulated)?
- **The Date**
  Sometimes older news stories are shared again and gain traction because of current events, but that doesn't mean they're relevant or accurate.
- **Your Bias**
  Especially with the rise of opinionated journalism and websites profiting from polarization, consider the intended audience for this story and if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.
- **The Experts**
  If a story feels flimsy, or doesn't seem to be properly cited, consider asking an expert in the field or consulting a fact-checking site.

More than anything, consider that outrageous misinformation has an easier time spreading on the internet than boring real news. An MIT study found that false stories on Twitter were **70% more likely** to get retweeted than accurate news.

But armed with knowledge about what "fake news" looks like, and with increased pressure on news organizations, the tide can be turned back in the favour of accurate news.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Relevant to all topics and students undertaking Geographical Inquiry.

1. Students work in groups to develop a 'Fake News in Geography Checklist' they can apply to sources they use when undertaking Geographical inquiry.
2. Groups contribute to a class discussion to develop a list that students at all levels can use. The final checklist should have the following features:
   – Be a 1-page table
   – Be easy to read
   – Not too text heavy
   – Limited to eight features they should check in a source
   – Have a tick box column
3. Students use the checklist to create an annotated example of a Geography Source to demonstrate either an Example of Fake News OR Example of Real News.
4. Print copies and place on classroom walls.

GTA NSW & ACT is continuing to offer its acclaimed online learning opportunities through the Open Learning platform.

These flexible, anywhere, anytime courses are NESA accredited for 3–5 hours.

The last year has seen an exciting expansion of course offerings to support new and experienced Geography teachers:

Geography 101: Concepts, Part 1 (5hr)

Geography 102: Concepts, Part 2 (5 hr)

Geography 110: Intro to Maps (3hr)

Geography 111: Intro to Topographic Map Skills (3hr)

Geography 141: Teaching Place and Liveability – for teachers new to the unit (3hr)

Geography 241: Teaching Place and Liveability – for experienced teachers (3hr)

Geography 142: Teaching Landscapes and Landforms (3hr)

These courses, written and facilitated by Dr Paul Batten and Katerina Stojanovski, have been rated very positively by participants. Here is a sample of their comments:

"An awesome module. One of the best I have completed. Clear instructions provided and very practical."

"Such a great course. Thank you so much. It's really nice to engage with other Geo teachers too."

"This online course was really handy! It meant that I could do some bits and then come back and complete the rest. It was also engaging."

"Excellent PD. Specific to our subject and able to be applied into our teaching immediately. Thanks GTA."

For more information about our online learning courses, please contact the GTANSW & ACT Online Learning Coordinator at gta.elearning@gmail.com

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