



NEWS IN EDUCATION

NIE 4-Week Fake News Lesson Series

Week 2: Identifying Fake News

Now that you know what fake news is, let's learn how to spot it. The tools provided in this week's lesson will equip you with basic and fundamental ways to begin practicing and eventually master the process.

Discerning Fact and Opinion in the Media

There are multiple types of news. It is important to know the different types of journalism in order to grow in your ability to discern fake news. Below is a basic rundown of 3 main types of reporting and a brief summary on each.

- **A beat report is _____**

Some reporters are assigned to black-and-white, facts-only story gathering in a specific area, such as sports, crime, or local news. They generate news only within their assigned topic. They spend their time traveling to locations of the latest happenings, finding sources, asking questions, and gathering all the details to provide you with the basic story.

- **An investigative report or series is _____**

Other reporters, often in collaboration with a team, investigate a topic of interest to write an article or a series of articles that will attract public attention and the attention of legal officials. The topic may be local, political, or corporate corruption, a serious crime, or another justice issue. These types of pieces can be very effective in bringing to light things that may have been hidden from the public eye, and prompting legal involvement and investigations that lead to justice. Investigative reporters may spend months or years researching and preparing their report.

- **An editorial is _____**

Journalists use the news to generate opinion pieces, also called op-eds. They use the latest news to write articles telling us what they think about the happenings. These can be on a wide variety of topics, such as government, crime, local and national issues, and many others.

Sometimes these pieces are even written to a specific person or group of people, like an open letter.

Knowing these different types of reporting will help you to discern fake news by first identifying whether the news story is a beat report, investigative report, or editorial. Once you establish what type of story it is, you can then dive in further with some questions:

Here are 5 questions to ask yourself about any news item you see. Mentally checking each news story against these 5 criteria will give you a good idea whether or not the story is false.

1. **What is the source, and is it a wide, well-known, trustworthy source that covers these topics regularly?** *Check for suspicious information such as unusual URLs or site names, slight misspellings in a web address, strange or outrageous sounding publication names, and excess use of punctuation and/or capitalizations. unusual URLs or site names, including those that end with ".co" -- these are often trying to appear like legitimate news sites, but they aren't. If you haven't heard of the source before, take a look at some of their other stories to get a feel for what topics they cover and whether or not there seems to be a lot of unfamiliar material.*
2. **Are there errors and do you observe low quality?** *Be skeptical of sources where you find words in all caps, headlines with glaring grammatical errors, bold claims with no sources, and sensationalist images. Check the "About" section of the source to find out who is associated with it. If this information is hard to find or unavailable, use caution. Search the source on Google or Snopes, and add words like "fake" "reliable" or "legit" to your search term to find information quickly.*
3. **Can the same story be found on prominent other media outlets?** *Check to see if other publications have covered the story. If so, compare the stories to see if the important details, like time, place, and exactly what happened or is happening, are the same. Additional material such as opinions and minor differences here and there won't take away the credibility of the story as long as these main details are strongly in place throughout various publications.*
4. **Are there quotes and multiple witness accounts in the story?** *It's a red flag if these elements are missing. An accurate story should list several witness accounts who essentially state the same facts. If the reporter of the story is the only person giving any details, you should be cautious. Credible journalists and reporters are trained to interview multiple sources and take great care to accurately quote those sources.*
5. **If the story mentions statistics or a study, are they clearly referenced and available for you to follow up, such as clicking on a link, or searching for the name of the person or place? When you do follow up, are they legitimate?** *Beware of vague sentences such as, "Studies show that students prefer doing more homework to class*

work.” Statements like these cannot be taken as facts. They are generalizations. If this statement were credible, you would be provided with specific details. What study? What are the details of the study? What percentage of students said that they prefer this? If those questions aren't answered, be cautious before you believe the statement without specific citations to back up claims.

Now that you've learned a few basic ways to identify fake news, you are well on your way to being an educated and informed citizen in your community, nation, and world. Once you've mastered the practice, you'll feel more confident as you see and hear different material, knowing that you are prepared to separate what is true from what is false. You'll also feel more assertive to tactfully challenge others when you observe them giving in to the hype of the latest outrageous story.

Here are some great **sites for fact-checking**:

- [FactCheck](#)
- [Snopes](#)
- [Politifact](#)
- [OpenSecrets](#)
- [TruthOrFiction](#)

For further research and discussion, check out [Poynter's International Fact Checking Code of Principles](#).

Week 2 Discussion Points:

1. *Which articles interest you more: fact or opinion pieces? Why?*
 2. *What sources of news do you typically trust? What sources do you rarely trust? Why?*
 3. *How much does it matter to you that the news you consume is factually sound?*
 4. *Have you used any of the 4 criteria when judging a news story before? Do you plan to use them now? Which one stands out to you the most?*
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