Protect Yourself from Fake News

KNOW WHAT IT IS, WHY IT WORKS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

THE HAYNER PUBLIC LIBRARY DISTRICT
What is Fake News?

Fake news is false information spread with the deliberate attempt to mislead, especially for financial or political gain. The information may be invented, manipulated, or presented out-of-context or with a deliberate ideological slant. Satire (fabricated news information that is created as humorous commentary, not with malicious intent) and opinion pieces can also lead to misinformation when taken as fact.

Why is Fake News a Problem?

Misinformation, propaganda and hoaxes are nothing new. However, technological advances have made fake news much easier to create and disseminate than ever before. And creators of fake news now have the knowledge and tools to make their content even more believable and persuasive.

Creators of fake news take advantage of several factors

Confirmation bias: we tend to interpret new evidence as confirmation of our existing beliefs

Echo chambers: our beliefs are amplified and reinforced by repetitive communication inside closed circles of like-minded individuals

Filter bubbles: website algorithms isolate us by only presenting information they predict we want to see

Repetition theory: the more we encounter a story or "fact" the more likely we are to believe it is true

Information overload: our ability to make accurate decisions and judgments is reduced when we encounter more information than we are able to process

Information avoidance: we avoid information that makes us feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable

Satisficing: we stop searching for information as soon as we find an answer that feels satisfying
How Can You Protect Yourself from Fake News?

Read beyond the headline
Headlines are often exaggerated or even falsified to attract clicks. Titles in all caps with exclamation points attempt to grab attention and manipulate emotions. What is the whole story?

Check the date
Old stories can be recirculated to mislead readers about the truth of current events.

Consider the source
Examine the URL: many false news sites mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the URL. (For example, abcnews.com.co is an illegitimate news source that attempts to deceive readers by mimicking abcnews.com.)
Review the formatting: misspellings, poor sentence structure and incorrect grammar are often signs of an unreliable source.
Ask yourself the following questions: What is the mission or purpose of the site presenting the story? Is the author real and credible? Is the story an opinion piece or satire?
Keep in mind: While the “About” section can be a good place to start when learning more about a source, sites devoted to fake news may manipulate this information to deceive unwary readers.

Examine the evidence
Search the story for supporting sources: Does the author provide links or references to supporting sources, such as experts in the field? Are those sources real and credible? Are they represented fairly and do they actually support the story? If photos are used remember that they may be manipulated or presented out of context. Perform a reverse image search in Google to see when, where, and how the photo has been used online.
Read laterally
How do other news sources not referenced by the site present the story? Be sure to consider their credentials as well. Are there multiple experts on this topic? Do they agree? Is it possible to find a first-hand source (for example, a local news outlet reporting on a local event versus a nationally syndicated news source)?

Consult a fact-checking website
Fact-checking websites often provide sources and evidence for their evaluations of a topic. Review these sources yourself. Do they support the story? If multiple fact-checking sites provide an evaluation, do they agree? (A list of fact-checking websites is provided below.)

Recognize your biases
We all have biases as a result of our life experiences and cultures. Creators of fake news work hard to manipulate these biases and our emotions to their advantage. Consider how your beliefs could affect your judgement. Avoid echo chambers by deliberately examining information from a wide-range of sources.

Don't perpetuate the problem
Take your time when evaluating a news story – resist pressure to quickly share stories or information that you have not first examined for accuracy and intent. If you see a friend sharing information you know is fake, take the initiative to kindly alert them to what isn't real.
Fact-Checking Sites

**Politifact.com**
A Pulitzer prize winning website that rates the accuracy of claims by elected officials and others who speak up in American politics. PolitiFact is run by editors and reporters from the Tampa Bay Times, an independent newspaper in Florida, as is PunditFact, a site devoted to fact-checking pundits.

**Factcheck.org**
A project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, a nonpartisan, nonprofit “consumer advocate” for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics.

**Snopes.com**
A website founded by David Mikkelson in 1995 as an expression of his interest in researching urban legends. The site has since grown into what is widely regarded by folklorists, journalists, and laypersons alike as one of the World Wide Web's essential resources.

**TruthOrFiction.com**
A "myth-busting" website that investigates the truth about rumors, inspirational stories, virus warnings, hoaxes, scams, humorous tales, pleas for help, urban legends, prayer requests, calls to action, and other forwarded emails.
Want to Learn More? Find These Resources at Your Library!

A Field Guide to Lies: Critical Thinking in the Information Age by Daniel Levitin (Hayner Libraries 153.42 LEV)

unSpun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation by Brooks Jackson (Hayner Alton Square 177.3 JAC)

Blur: How to Know What’s True in the Age of Information Overload by Bill Kovach (Available through SHARE)

News Literacy: The Keys to Combating Fake News by Michelle Luhtala (Available through SHARE)

The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread by Caitlin O’Connor (Available through SHARE)

Post-truth by Lee McIntyre (Available through SHARE)

Alternative Facts, Post-Truth and the Information War by Grey House Publishing (Available through SHARE)

Sources:
