

How to spot fake news

Read some tips for spotting fake news to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

bombard	fooled	unrelated	source
fake	subtle	phenomenon	sure

1. A fake is something that is designed to look real but isn't.
2. If you bombard someone with messages or information, you give them so much that it is difficult to deal with at all.
3. A phenomenon is a rare or important fact or event.
4. If something is subtle, it is not obvious and it is difficult to notice.
5. If you are fooled, you are tricked into believing something that is not true.
6. If you are sure about something, you are confident that it is true or correct.
7. If something is unrelated to something else, the two things have nothing to do with each other.
8. A source is a thing, person or place that provides information.

Reading text: How to spot fake news

Every time you're online, you are bombarded by pictures, articles, links and videos trying to tell their story. Unfortunately, not all of these stories are true. Sometimes they want you to click on another story or advertisement at their own site, other times they want to upset people for political reasons. These days it's so easy to share information. These stories circulate quickly, and the result is ... fake news.

There is a range of fake news: from crazy stories which people easily recognise to more subtle types of misinformation. Experts in media studies and online psychology have been examining the fake news phenomenon. Read these tips, and don't get fooled!

1. Check the source

Look at the website where the story comes from. Does it look real? Is the text well written? Are there a variety of other stories or is it just one story? Fake news websites often use addresses that sound like real newspapers, but don't have many real stories about other

topics. If you aren't sure, click on the 'About' page and look for a clear description of the organisation.

2. Watch out for fake photos

Many fake news stories use images that are Photoshopped or taken from an unrelated site. Sometimes, if you just look closely at an image, you can see if it has been changed. Or use a tool like Google Reverse Image search. It will show you if the same image has been used in other contexts.

3. Check the story is in other places

Look to see if the story you are reading is on other news sites that you know and trust. If you do find it on many other sites, then it probably isn't fake (although there are some exceptions), as many big news organisations try to check their sources before they publish a story.

4. Look for other signs

There are other techniques that fake news uses. These include using ALL CAPS and lots of ads that pop up when you click on a link. Also, think about how the story makes you feel. If the news story makes you angry, it's probably designed to make you angry.

If you know these things about online news, and can apply them in your everyday life, then you have the control over what to read, what to believe and most importantly what to share. If you find a news story that you know is fake, the most important advice is: don't share it!

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best title for the text.

- a. Experts share dangers of fake news
- ☒ b. Experts share top tips for resisting fake news
- c. How to create fake news: a guide
- d. Tips on how to read the news online

Task 2

Circle the correct answers.

1. Which reason is NOT given for an online fake news story?
 - a. To convince people of a political view
 - b. To make people angry or sad
 - ☒ c. To plant a virus in your computer

2. The text says some fake news ...
 - a. is easy to recognise as fake.
 - b. is funny.
 - ☒ c. comes from the political right.

3. Which of these may mean that a news site should not be trusted?
 - a. The text is well written.
 - b. The site has a variety of other stories.
 - ☒ c. The site's 'About' page does not clearly describe the organisation.

4. Some images on fake news ...
 - a. are real images, but come from a different website.
 - b. are images that have been changed.
 - ☒ c. both the above

5. Fake news stories ...
 - ☒ a. are usually only on fake news sites or social media.
 - b. are not on any websites, only in social media.
 - c. are often hidden on real news sites.

6. Many fake news stories are written ...
 - a. without capital letters and with terrible spelling.
 - ☒ b. in a way that makes people upset.
 - c. inside of advertisements that pop up on your screen.

7. What should you do with fake news?
 - a. Report it to the police
 - b. Make a note of it for reference
 - ☒ c. Not show it to other people online

8. What is the purpose of this article?
 - a. To complain
 - ☒ b. To inform
 - c. To entertain

Discussion

Have you ever read a fake news story online? Are you worried about this problem?

Answers

Preparation task

1. fake
2. bombard
3. phenomenon
4. subtle
5. fooled
6. sure
7. unrelated
8. source

Task 1

b

Task 2

1. c
2. a
3. c
4. c
5. a
6. b
7. c
8. b