**How to Spot Real and Fake News**

**Critically Appraising Information**

**Developing a critical mindset is the first step to spotting fake news.**

She quickly posts a response, shares the story with her contacts, and emails it to her team so that they can discuss it later.

But then Alice has a troubling thought. What if the story wasn't true? What if she just shared a "fake news" story? After all, she didn't check the source, and it was from a website she'd never heard of before.

If she has been a victim of fake news, and then added to the rumor mill herself, how will people ever trust her again?

Fortunately, there's lots you can do to avoid making the same mistake as Alice. In this article, we explore how you can separate fake news from the truth.

**What Is Fake News?**

There are two kinds of fake news:

1. **Stories that aren't true.** These are deliberately invented stories designed to make people believe something false, to buy a certain product, or to visit a certain website.
2. **Stories that have some truth, but aren't 100 percent accurate.** For example, a politician attends a conference, but a news story reports that he or she was there to criticize policy rather than to support it.

This kind of fake news is biased, and aims to convince readers of a certain political or ideological viewpoint. Stories like this can also be down to mistakes or "urban myths."

**Note:**

To confuse matters further, there are also people who claim that factually accurate stories are fake news, just because they don't agree with them or find them uncomfortable.

**Where Does Fake News Come From?**

Fake news is nothing new. But, what is new is how easy it's become to share information – both true and false – on a massive scale.

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn allow almost anyone to publish their thoughts or share stories to the world.

The trouble is, most people don't check the source of the material that they view online before they share it, which can lead to fake news spreading quickly or even "going viral."

At the same time, it's become harder to identify the source of news stories, particularly on the internet, which can make it difficult to assess their accuracy.

This has led to a flood of fake news. In fact, one [**study**](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/fake-news-2016.pdf) found that more than 25 percent of Americans visited a fake news website in a six-week period during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

But, not all fake news stories are found online. Co-workers who gossip by the water cooler and print publications that fail to check their facts, for example, are also guilty of spreading misinformation, even if inadvertently.

**The Impact of Fake News in the Workplace**

[**Research**](https://www.leadershipiq.com/blogs/leadershipiq/study-fake-news-hits-the-workplace) shows that 59 percent of people are concerned about the effect that fake news has in the workplace, and with good reason!

For example, some people might start to believe that they no longer need facts to back up their arguments. Others start to mistrust information all together. They stop listening to industry news or reports, and disengage entirely, slowing their professional growth and development. Ultimately, this can damage an organization's learning culture.

Fake news can affect behavior, too. It encourages people to invent excuses, to dismiss others' ideas, to exaggerate the truth, and to spread rumor. This can create divided, anxious workplaces where people are cynical and unsure of who to trust.

They might even begin to mistrust **you** if they believe that authority figures have lied to them, or that the information that they are working with is suspect. This can sap people of the curiosity, enthusiasm and ambition that they need to be successful.

Misinformation and fake news can also harm your organization. Invented reviews of your products or inaccurate financial updates, for example, can do serious [**reputational damage**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/corporate-brand-reputation.htm) .

**Six Ways to Spot Fake News**

Separating fact from fiction accurately can seem daunting. But getting to the truth is always worth the effort – even if it's not what you want to hear! Use these six steps to weed out the truth from the lies:

**1. Develop a Critical Mindset**

One of the main reasons fake news is such a big issue is that it is often believable, which means it's easy to get caught out. Many fake news stories are also written to create "shock" value.

This means it's essential that you keep your emotional response to such stories in check. Instead, approach what you see and hear rationally and [**critically**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_95.htm) .

Ask yourself, "Why has this story been written? Is it to persuade me of a certain viewpoint? Is it selling me a particular product? Or is it trying to get me to click through to another website?"

**2. Check the Source**

If you come across a story from a source that you've never heard of before, do some digging! Find out a bit more about the publisher – is it a professional and well-known news agency or is it someone's personal blog?

Check the URL of the page, too. (A URL, or Uniform Resource Locator, is a web address that helps browsers to find a site on the internet.) Strange-sounding URLs that end in extensions like ".infonet" and ".offer," rather than ".com" or ".co.uk," or that contain spelling errors, may mean that the source is suspect.

If the information is something that you've been told by another person, consider his reputation and professional experience. Is he known for his [**expertise**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_04.htm)  on the matter? Or does he tend to exaggerate the truth?

**Tip:**

Trusted online sources like [**Snopes**](https://www.snopes.com/) can help you to verify stories that sound too good to be true.

**3. See Who Else Is Reporting the Story**

Check whether the story has been picked up by other well-known news publishers. Stories from organizations like Reuters, CNN and the BBC, will have been checked and verified beforehand. If the information you have isn't from a well-known source like these, there's a chance that it could be fake.

However, you need to be careful even here. People who spread fake news and "alternative facts" sometimes create web pages, newspaper mockups, or "doctored" images that look official, but aren't.

So, if you see a suspicious post that looks like it's from CNN, for example, check CNN's homepage to verify that it's really there.

**4. Examine the Evidence**

A credible news story will include plenty of facts – quotes from experts, survey data and official statistics, for example. If these are missing or the source is an unknown expert or a "friend," question it!

Does the evidence prove that something definitely happened? Or, have the facts been "twisted" to back up a particular viewpoint?

**5. Look for Fake Images**

Modern editing software has made it easy for people to create fake images that look professional and real. In fact, [**research**](https://arxiv.org/abs/1509.05301) shows that only half of us can tell when images are fake.

However, there are some warning signs you can look out for. Strange shadows on the image, for example, or jagged edges around a figure. If you still have doubts, you can use tools such as [**Google Reverse Image Search**](https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?hl=en) to check whether the image has been altered or used in the wrong context.

**6. Check That It "Sounds Right"**

Finally, use your common sense! If a story sounds unbelievable, it probably is. Bear in mind that fake news is designed to "feed" your biases or fears. And, remember, just because a story sounds "right" and true, doesn't mean that it is.

For example, it's unlikely that your favorite designer brand is giving away a million free dresses to people who turn up to its stores. Equally, just because your colleague believes that two married co-workers are having an affair, doesn't mean it's true.

**Tip:**

Some stories that you'll encounter will sound "wrong," but won't necessarily be fake news. They could be intentional satire, for example, or something that comes from a humorous website, like The Onion or The Daily Mash, for example.

Warning:

If these tips suggest that the information that you have is fake, or if you have any doubts about it, avoid sharing it with others. Doing so could lead to rumors spreading and may harm your professional credibility.

#### Key Points

Fake news refers to deliberate untruths or stories that contain some truth, but which aren't completely accurate. Some people also claim that truthful stories are "fake news," just because they don't agree with them.

Fake news can have a negative impact on workplace behavior. For example, by damaging learning culture, and causing rumor and mistrust to spread. So, it's vital to know how to separate the real from the fake. You can do this by following these six steps:

1. Develop a critical mindset.
2. Check the source.
3. See who else is reporting the story.
4. Examine the evidence.
5. Look for fake images.
6. Check that it "sounds right."