

Is it Fake or Real News?

Fake news has been around forever, but the Internet and Artificial intelligence “AI” is helping spread and amplify fakes. We all need to fight back against groups on the fringes and trolls who like to stir up trouble. The problem is both domestic and foreign and not just fake text. Readily available online tools let anyone with modest skills create bogus news websites, articles, clone voices, manipulate photos and fabricate video that seems real.

Fact Checking Checklist

Use the questions below to assess the likelihood of fake news. The more red flags, the more skeptical you should be!

- Does it cause a strong emotional reaction? Are you angry? Are you intensely hoping that the news turns out to be true or false? ▶ if Yes
- Was it promoted on a website? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know? ▶ if Yes
- Does it use excessive punctuation(!!) or ALL CAPS for emphasis? ▶ if Yes
- Does it make a claim about containing a secret or telling you something that “the media” doesn’t want you to know? ▶ if Yes
- Is this news designed for easy sharing, like a meme? ▶ if Yes
- Is it a well-known news source? ▶ if No
- Is there a byline (an author’s name) attached to the piece? ▶ if No
- Check the website’s “About” section: Does the site describe itself as a “fantasy news” or “satirical news” site? ▶ if Yes
- Does the person or organization that produced the news have any editorial standards? ▶ if No
- Does the “contact us” section include an email address that matches the domain (not a Gmail or Yahoo email address)? ▶ if No
- Does a quick search for the name of the website raise any suspicions? ▶ if Yes
- Does the example you’re evaluating have a current date on it? ▶ if No
- Does the example cite a variety of sources, including official and expert sources? Does the news this example provides appear in reports from (other) news outlets? ▶ if No
- Does the example hyperlink to other quality sources? ▶ if No
- A reverse image search confirms the image is authentic (not altered or taken from another context)? ▶ if No
Use images.google.com, www.TinEye.com, www.Yandex.com, and others.
- You searched a fact-checking site that labels it as less than true? ▶ if Yes
Use www.Snopes.com, www.FactCheck.org, www.PolitiFact.com, www.APnews.com/AP-Fact-Check, www.RumorGuard.org, www.WashingtonPost.com/politics/fact-checker, and others.

Tips to Stay Safe

- Slow down and give yourself time to process what you read, see, and hear.
- Context - False context is the most common using real or fake images with fake news. Fakes might alter when an image was captured or change the context entirely like on a sign or shirt. It is usually done to get views, clicks, or to fool people. We all have a confirmation bias where our natural tendency is to readily accept news, even fake, that reinforces our existing beliefs. This is especially true with politics.
- Reasoning - Fake news is often designed to exploit our cognitive biases and vulnerability to logical fallacies. Most fakes do not pass the smell test. They exploit the news gap or time with us hungry for news. If the message seems off, it’s probably false. Does it really make sense to you? Bigfoot, Loch Ness monster, or aliens.
- What’s the evidence (or lack thereof). Many fake claims lack any pretense of evidence, while others present digital fakes and out-of-context elements for support. Evaluating the evidence for a claim is a key fact-checking skill.
- Source - Not all sources are created equal, but it can be easy to glaze over significant differences while scrolling through social media feeds, texts, or links. Consider the source, is it satire like The National Enquirer or trusted like The AP, Getty Images, or Reuters? Search for multiple sources, particularly if the subject seems extreme. Do what’s called lateral reading, which is ‘Who else is reporting on this?’. Do a search on a site <https://news.google.com/>. If another source is reporting on it, they might give more context. If your search doesn’t turn up other stories on the same topic, that’s a huge red flag. Never trust a screenshot of a news article because it can easily be manipulated, it should be a link to the full article. Who shared it or where did it come from? Get news from mainstream media outlets, however imperfect they may be.

- Pink slime are websites that masquerade as news outlets. Their undisclosed funding is coming from political operatives on the left and the right. In February, NewsGuard, an organization founded by media entrepreneur and journalist Steven Brill that rates the trustworthiness of news websites, launched the 2024 Elections Misinformation Tracking Center. It found 963 websites worldwide that repeatedly published false claims about elections. It identified 793 social media accounts associated with those sites. And as of March 2024, 1,178 partisan sites were masquerading as local news outlets with names such as The Philadelphia Leader and The Copper Courier. Articles are written by people who are trying to support their own candidate or smear the other one.
- There is no magic flag or field that identifies AI generated images. Rarely will you see six fingers, an unattached earlobe and other weird body parts or backgrounds that strike you as fake. They are getting better all the time. OpenAI recently began teasing a new text-to-video AI model called Sora, which can generate slick one-minute Hollywood-style videos just from a text prompt. OpenAI also recently demonstrated an AI tool called Voice Engine that can generate, based on text input and a 15-second audio sample, emotive voices that closely resemble a particular speaker. How do we know a movie like Independence Day is a movie and not news of an alien invasion? This is where your own knowledge of how the world works is going to be to your benefit. If something seems too scandalous, too outrageous or too novel, then seek other sources and do a little bit of your own fact checking or find out if reputable news organizations are also reporting on it.
- What's flagged as fake may be true. AI allows a politician who does something wrong and gets caught to say, 'Oh, that's a deepfake, that wasn't me, somebody manipulated it.'
- AI chatbots are unreliable sources for election info. Among their findings:
 - All the AI models performed poorly around election news.
 - Half the responses were inaccurate.
 - More than a third of responses were considered harmful or incomplete.
 - More than 1 in 10 were deemed biased.
 - Answers were often hallucinations, meaning they sounded correct or authoritative but were fabricated.
- Social media shouldn't be your source for news. Meta's policy requires Facebook and Instagram advertisers to disclose whenever a social issue, election or political ad contains a photorealistic image or video or realistic-sounding audio that was digitally created or altered. Meta also said it will not allow ads that independent fact checkers rate as "false, altered, partly false or missing context." The science is unequivocal here. Social media is bad for your mental and physical health, let alone your IQ. If you are on social media, don't use them as a news source, they are a place for entertainment and connecting with your friends.
- Think before sharing. Social media makes it easy to react quickly and emotionally to posts and to unwittingly share misinformation. Before sharing content, stop for a moment, take a deep breath, and consider your emotions and biases. When we share content without first verifying its accuracy, we all become misinformation agents.
- Escape your bubble. Whatever your beliefs, we share something in common: Confirmation bias. We seek news and accept misinformation because it affirms what we already think. Get a 360-degree understanding of a topic: to challenge your beliefs rather than reinforce them. "If you watch Fox News, try watching CNN during the day, or vice versa. What are the other sides of the story that you're not hearing? Most issues are not black or white, but something in between.
- Breaking new is always full of incomplete news, it can take up to 72 hours before a complete picture is reported.
- News organizations have less fact checkers today on their staff.
- Everyone needs to be a doubting Thomas.



Additional Links and Information

Carondelet Tech Help Resources: <https://carondeletvillage.org/tech-help-resources/>
 Questions or comments can be sent to: TCKreuzer@gmail.com