Checklist

Following is a short checklist of other tips, developed by the editors of CQ Researcher, to help students and teachers avoid the pitfalls posed by the rise of fake news.

- **Consider the source of the information.** Is it legitimate and trustworthy? Does it have high standards for accuracy, balance and fairness? Are the articles bylined — and if so, what do searches on the authors’ names tell you about their qualifications and trustworthiness? When you read an article, ask yourself: Why should I believe it?

- **Be wary of bloggers who lack expertise** on a subject or who don’t follow conventional editorial standards. Check blog posts against coverage of the same topic in the mainstream media.

- **Are the people being quoted in a news story qualified to speak on the subject?** Do a quick online search to check their qualifications and background. In a story on a controversial subject, a lack of quotes from qualified sources can signal that the article lacks balance, depth, context and authority — and that it might simply reflect the writer’s opinion.

- **Be skeptical of “news” shared on social media.** Rumors disguised as facts often take on a life of their own. Use common sense. Does the information seem logical when viewed impartially and critically? Can the facts be verified?

- **Use Google as a starting point, not an ending point, in your research.** And remember, the first hits in an internet search aren’t always the most reliable.

- **Watch for bias among media personalities,** whether liberal or conservative, especially on cable news shows. Are they fair and impartial or are they promoting their own views or those of a political party, pressure group or other entity?

- **Follow the money.** Studies, think tank reports and opinion articles may be funded by corporations, foundations or advocacy groups with ideological agendas. Ask yourself: How might funding have influenced the content?

- **Be wary of articles labeled “sponsored content.”** Such content typically means a company, organization or perhaps even a government entity paid for it.

- **Look out for strange or unfamiliar URLs or domain names,** such as those that end in .com.co or .io. They can be the first clues that a site may be trafficking in fake news. Check the site's “About” section — if it has one. Often, you’ll find clues to whether the site is legitimate and whether it follows acceptable editorial standards. Some bogus publications have fake mailing addresses, a clear sign of their intent to deceive.

- **When in doubt, don’t.** Don’t use information in an assignment, broadcast it on social media or tweet it in a way that implies it’s true if you suspect it is not. Nothing kills fake news faster than healthy skepticism and a commitment to quality research.

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