

REAL NEWS V. FAKE NEWS

PREPARED BY THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF
BERKS COUNTY

TAKE A MOMENT

Take a moment to examine articles you find on the Internet before sharing. Ask yourself some questions to help identify whether it is real or fake news.

1. **Who** wrote it? What are their credentials? If you can't find who wrote it, don't share it!
2. **Why** was this article created? Is it sponsored by a group trying to convince you of their viewpoint? Are they trying to sell you something? Is it full of advertisements?
3. **Where** did it come from? Do you recognize the URL? Pay close attention! Make sure it is the real website and not a fake look-alike!
4. **What** evidence is presented? Does the article cite reputable sources? What do other sources say? Are the pictures realistic? Could they have been photoshopped?

Hint: If it is a real news story, other reputable sources will be reporting on it.
5. **When** was the article written? Is the information outdated? Is it even relevant?

BIAS? MISTAKES? PROPAGANDA? FAKE NEWS?? ALTERNATIVE FACTS?!

As consumers of news, it is important for all of us to learn the difference between real news, fake news, biased news, propaganda, and simple, old-fashioned mistakes.

Bias – Bias can be as simple as someone's perspective. All of us have bias because all of us view the world differently. Some of us are liberal in our thinking, some of us a bit more conservative. Simply leaning to the "right" or the "left" doesn't necessarily make news unreliable. Reading news from a different political viewpoint is a good thing! It helps you understand people who don't think the way you do. However, there is also the kind of bias that is directed against other people. That kind of bias manifests itself in prejudice, racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, etc. That is the kind of bias you want to avoid in media.

Mistakes – Journalists are people, too. Sometimes, despite all best efforts, journalists get it wrong. Good journalists and good news sources do their best to produce accurate news, and they print retractions and corrections when they are wrong.

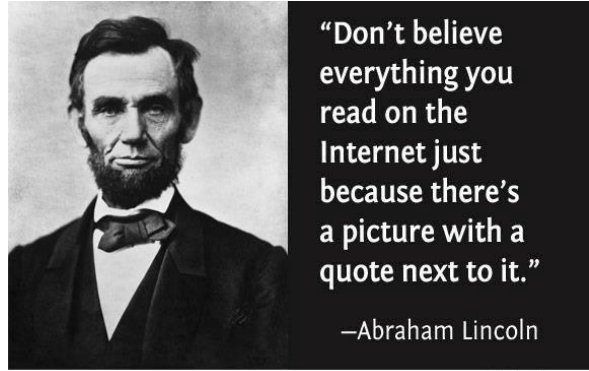
Propaganda – Propaganda is art or media designed to promote a certain political cause or viewpoint. Propaganda, which can be misleading, seeks emotional responses from the viewer to convince them to take some action. Think of war propaganda posters of WWI and WWII. The propaganda encouraged viewers to join the Army, ration food, or purchase war bonds. To do this, they played on fear, anger, or extreme patriotism. Beware of "news" that enrages you or challenges someone else's patriotism. It might not be news. It might be propaganda.

Fake news – Contrary to what some people think, fake news is not just news you don't agree with or news that makes someone look bad. Fake news is intentionally designed to mislead people with false, mostly inflammatory information to get more people to share it. Fake news is often a money-making scheme designed to play on people's ignorance and fear. The key here is that this misleading is done intentionally.

Alternative Facts – Alternative facts are not facts. Facts are supported by evidence. If you cannot find evidence, keep looking until you do. While there is no alternative to finding evidence, there can be different *interpretations* of evidence.

BUT ANYONE CAN PUBLISH ON THE INTERNET, SO HOW CAN WE TRUST THE NEWS?

Journalism is a profession. Journalists spend a lot of time learning their craft and strengthening their skills. They draw conclusions based on evidence; they do not force the evidence to support their own conclusions. Professional journalists follow a code of conduct that includes behaving ethically, avoiding bias, fact checking, and corroborating evidence with other reliable sources. Stick with media sources that abide by the rules of journalistic integrity and it's a safe bet that what they report is reliably accurate.



The Internet can be tricky. Much of what we find on the Internet can be extremely useful, but a lot of it is wrong, misleading, or just plain fake news. Beware of misleading graphics and memes. Memes that look like they come from reputable sources have been the source of a lot of misinformation on the Internet. Just because a meme has its "source" listed doesn't mean the information is accurate. Always double-check the information with reputable sources.

HOW CAN I FACT CHECK?

One thing that you can do is verify information with other reputable news sources. There are some reliable places to fact-check information. Listed below are a few reputable fact checkers.

- Factcheck.org – www.factcheck.org
- Snopes – www.snopes.com
- Politifact – www.politifact.com
- RealOrSatire.com – www.realorsatire.com

WHERE CAN I FIND RELIABLE NEWS?

Some reputable news organizations have been around for a long time and have built up a strong reputation for integrity and high journalistic standards. **ABC News, Reuters, BBC News, NPR, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal** are reliable news sources. Don't forget your **local newspaper!**

Being new doesn't necessarily make a news source unreliable. Some new organizations were created to

help news consumers understand politics and government. Here are just a few reputable ones:

- **Ballotpedia** – a nonpartisan, nonprofit collaborative encyclopedia that covers local, state, and national politics and elections. www.ballotpedia.org
- **Brookings Institution** – a nonprofit think tank that offers in-depth analysis of economics, public policy, foreign policy, and global affairs. It offers numerous daily and weekly newsletters on both general and specific political topics. www.brookings.edu
- **Annenberg Public Policy Center** – a center for study of public policy from the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org
- **Pew Research Center** – one of the most well-known and trusted public opinion polling organizations. www.pewresearch.org

REMEMBER! JUST BECAUSE YOU SEE IT ON THE INTERNET, THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT TRUE! TAKE A MOMENT TO VERIFY THE INFORMATION BEFORE YOU POST!