# News Matters: Becoming a Skilled Consumer of News

| Overview | Outcomes |
|---|---|
| Bias, fake news, and reportorial error are not new phenomena, but the echo chamber of social media, today's political polarization, and hostility toward the press have combined to create a situation in which the ability to evaluate news sources is more critical than ever. The lesson uses the "PizzaGate" incident to engage students in considering how fake news can affect people. Students then analyze a graphic that identifies types of problematic "news" they need to be aware of, and they are introduced to a tool useful in analyzing sources. Finally, they consider what they will do when confronted with news of questionable accuracy.<br><br>In optional extension activities, students (A) take a deeper dive into fake news, learning its hallmarks and considering what can be done about fake news without violating the First Amendment, (B) examine the effects of calling legitimate news sources "fake news," and (C) learn and apply skills for detecting bias, whether intentional or unintentional. | As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:<br><br>– Distinguish between fake news, satire, biased news, and errors;<br><br>– Use a structured approaching to analyzing news sources; and<br><br>– Discuss dilemmas news consumers face when confronted with fake news, bias, or errors.<br><br>Through the optional extension activities, students will be able to:<br><br>– Identify the hallmarks of fake news and discuss strategies for addressing fake news (Ext. A);<br><br>– Analyze a graphic to determine how much people trust the news (Ext. B);<br><br>– Make connections between false accusations of fake news and low public trust in media (Ext. B); and<br><br>– Recognize signs of bias and compare news presented from different perspectives (Ext. C). |

## Recommended Timing: 80 Minutes

1. Engaging with the Issue of Fake News (15 minutes)
2. Evaluating News Sources (50 minutes)
3. What Would You Do? (10 minutes)
4. Summary/Debrief (5 minutes)

## Handouts & Additional Materials

- **Handout 1 – A Fake News Case Study**
- **Handout 2 – What is Reliable?**
- **Handout 3 – Tool for Evaluating News Sources**
- **Handout 4 – What Would You Do?**
- **Handout 5 – How Bias Creeps into the News (Optional)**
- You will also need Internet access and devices students can use to access and analyze websites in pairs.

## Preparing to Teach

Throughout this lesson, students encounter several important vocabulary words: *reporting, fake news, investigate, satire, bias, source, reputable, facts, opinions, verify, omissions,* and *social consensus.* Decide, in advance, if you will pre-teach the vocabulary or build in comprehension checks during the lesson.

In part of the lesson, students access online news and fake news stories. Decide, in advance, if you want to let students choose their own stories or if you want to select the stories and sites for them to analyze. If you want to select the resources, you may start with the list of options below. Review them before you teach to ensure they are suitable for your class. You may substitute stories/sites of your own choosing, but be sure to include examples of the following: (1) a relatively unbiased account of a news event paired with an opinion piece (reflecting a perspective) about the same event, (2) a satirical item, (3) an example of an erroneous story, and (4) an example of fake news. Note that many fake news stories contain offensive information (the example below includes stereotypes about Chinese people's eating habits). In addition, teachers should be aware that these types of sites often have ads or links to stories that are sexually suggestive.

You might want to write the links onto **Handout 3** before you copy it. Alternatively, if you are planning to teach this lesson with an online tool such as GoogleClassroom, you may want to embed the links directly. This will save your students quite a bit of time and will help keep them focused on the "right" internet sites. Depending on the time available, you may want to give two or three sites to each student group, ensuring that all sites are covered by at least some groups.

- "Philando Castile Aftermath," by Rod Dreher, *The American Conservative* (June 21, 2017), http://ow.ly/vBRy30dOJ5e.
    - o **Note:** This is an opinion piece; the author presents his perspective on the issue.
- "Minn. Officer Acquitted in Shooting of Philando Castile during Traffic Stop, Dismissed from Police Force," by Mark Berman, *Washington Post* (June 17, 2017), http://ow.ly/DSzu30dOJbu.
    - o **Note:** This is a straightforward report on the result of the police officer's trial, though students might question the headline, which would provide an opportunity to point out that the reporters do not write the headlines for their stories.

- "Scientists Confident Artificially Intelligent Machines Can Be Programmed to Be Lenient Slave Masters," *The Onion* (August 25, 2015), http://ow.ly/3TBv30dOJob.
  - o **Note:** This is a satirical story that can be easily identified by Googling the site name. Students could also Google *The Onion*'s motto—"tu stultus es"—which means "you are stupid."
- "Comey Expected to Refute Trump," by Greg Richter (June 6, 2017), Newsmax, http://ow.ly/lnjw30dOJsa.
  - o **Note:** This is a story posted by NewsMax, a conservative-leaning media organization, which relies entirely on reporting by CNN. That reporting was erroneous, and was later corrected by CNN (http://ow.ly/tYHJ30eesT1), although this article does not indicate that. If students do not notice it, point out that while the story includes CNN in the title and refers to CNN many times, it is not, in fact, written by CNN. Students may note that the information in the original article is not sourced, while the revised article is based on the written version of Comey's opening statement and thus reliably sourced.
- "New York: Chinese Immigrant Sold Hot Dogs Made with Real Dog Meat," *World News Daily Report* (June 2017), http://ow.ly/rwRQ30dOJJE.
  - o **Note:** World News Daily Report is a site that publishes many fabricated stories, which often contain stereotypes and ugly accusations, as this story does. The accuracy of this story can be checked by consulting Snopes. Be aware that these types of sites often have ads or links to stories that are sexually suggestive.

## Optional Extension Activities

Please see the end of the lesson plan to find additional teaching ideas.

# Engaging with the Issue of Fake News (15 minutes)

1) Ask students:
   - What does it mean to be a reporter?
   - What do reporters do?

   Help students develop a definition of ***reporting*** as: *The process of developing a factual account of an event or situation through observation and investigation*.

   Point out that not everything we encounter in the media is reporting: some articles present opinions, others are invented rather than reported. The "information" they present may be unreliable. Tell students that, in this lesson, they are going to look at fake news and other kinds of unreliable information that they may encounter every day.

2) Distribute **Handout 1: A Fake News Case Study** and go over the definition of fake news.

**NOTE**: If you have struggling readers, you may want to read it aloud or have a volunteer do so, pausing to confirm students understand. Use the questions below (which appear on the handout) to stimulate discussion:

- What are the facts of the case?

- Does the story about child slaves meet the definition of fake news?

- What caused Edgar Maddison Welch to go to the pizzeria with multiple weapons? What role did fake news play? What role do you think Welch's personality and ideas played in his actions?
  *Be sure to note that going to "investigate" a story with the intention of providing "street" justice or taking the law in one's own hands—in essence, being a* **vigilante**—*would be inappropriate even if the story were true.)*

- Why is being able to recognize fake news important?

- Why do you think it is so hard to change people's minds when they believe a false story? Do you have trouble changing your mind once you believe something is true?

3) Tell students the next step of the lesson is to learn some strategies to distinguish reliable from unreliable sources.

# Evaluating News Sources (50 minutes)

4) Explain that good consumers of news need to be aware of three potential problems, in addition to the "fake news" they just learned about: (1) satire; (2) biased news; and (3) reporting errors. Distribute **Handout 2: What is Reliable?** To help students understand the categories not yet discussed, you may want to use the following explanation and examples:

- **Satire:** Satire is a form of humor that illustrates and ridicules people's weaknesses. The purpose of satire is to poke fun at people or events, often to make a political point. Some satire pretends to be a news story—the "Weekend Update" segment on *Saturday Night Live* and *The Onion* are good examples of this. Satirists do not intend for consumers to believe what they say, but instead to think differently about people and events in the news as a result of the humor. Often, however, consumers do not realize that what they are watching or reading is satire and, as a result, believe it is accurate.

- **Biased News:** Biased news reflects a particular point of view. Opinion pieces and editorials are designed to present a perspective, but opinions can also creep into regular news coverage and headlines. For example, when former FBI director James Comey testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee in June 2017, he quoted President Trump as saying to him "I hope you can see your way clear to letting this [investigation into Michael Flynn's connections with Russians] go." The cable news channels were simultaneously adding *"crawls," a few words of text at the bottom of the screen*. The crawls varied dramatically, even while commenting on the exact same quote:

**MSNBC:** Comey: "Sure" special counsel is looking into whether Trump obstructed justice
**CNN:** Comey: I took Trump's words as a directive
**Fox News:** Comey: Pres did not order me to let Flynn probe go

MSNBC focused on what Comey said about the special counsel investigating whether the President's statement could be seen as obstruction of justice. CNN reported the answer Comey gave to a question about what he thought the President meant. Fox focused on the fact that the President's words were not an outright order. What biases do these "crawls" reflect?

Alternatively, if you want to use a nonpolitical example of bias, consider these two headlines about a hockey game between the Detroit Red Wings and Colorado Avalanche, one from a paper in Colorado, one from a paper in Michigan:

*Denver Post*: Injury begins Avs' tumble
*Detroit News*: Wings are too much for Avalanche

What biases about the game and the two teams do these headlines reflect?

- **Reporting Errors:** Sometimes, journalists make mistakes. They may report inaccurate information given to them by a source (that is why journalists learn to verify information from one source with a second or even third source) or may misinterpret what they see. Typically, if and when journalists and news publishers become aware of a mistake, they post a correction or a retraction. If an error is very serious, a reporter or editor may be fired.

5) Point out the continuum at the bottom of the page on **Handout 2**. If necessary, define "reliable" and "unreliable." Ask students to place each of the categories of news defined on their handout along the continuum from "Reliable" to "Unreliable." Discuss students' placements, using questions such as the following:
   - Which category of news is most reliable? Why do you say that? Do you think you can identify this type of news when you see it?
   - Which category of news is least reliable? Why do you say that? Do you think you can identify this type of news when you see it?
   - How did you decide how far along the continuum to put the categories you placed in the middle sections of the continuum?
   - If you substituted the words "Valuable" and "Not Valuable" for the terms "Reliable" and "Unreliable," would that change how you positioned the items on the continuum? Why or why not? (Help students recognize that understanding different perspectives can be valuable, as long as they recognize that the source has a point of view.)

6) Distribute **Handout 3: Tool for Evaluating News Sources** and go over the directions with the class, making sure that students understand how to use the series of questions presented to assess a source. If any of the vocabulary is unfamiliar, collaboratively define the terms.

Ask students to work in pairs to apply the tool to one or two news sources. You may want to let them choose two sources themselves or choose a few current sources from which students can choose. The sources listed in the Preparation section provide another option.

7) Discuss students' findings, focusing particularly on which questions on the analysis tool are most difficult to answer and, by extension, which type of problematic information is most difficult to detect and thus students must take the greatest care to consider when analyzing sources.

# What Would You Do? (10 minutes)

8) Pair students and distribute **Handout 4: What Would You Do?** Explain that it presents some dilemmas that people may face as consumers of news. Ask students to discuss with their partners what they would do in each situation.

9) Debrief the activity by focusing on the consequences of the various options available in each situation. You may want to note in discussing Dilemma 1 that one of the factors that can cause people to believe fake news is the perception that others believe it. This is called *social consensus*. Similarly, people are more likely to believe something that they have heard often. Neither of these factors is reliable evidence that something is true.

# Summary/Debrief (5 minutes)

Use some of the following questions to debrief the lesson:
- How would you define fake news?…Satire?…Bias? … Reporting error?
- Which have you encountered most often?
- Which, in your opinion, is the most serious problem?
- What questions should you ask about a source in order to determine if it is reliable or not?
- What is your responsibility as a news consumer in <u>evaluating</u> sources?
- What is your responsibility in <u>communicating with others</u> about fake or biased news?
- What is the most important idea you learned today?

## Optional Extension/Enrichment Activities

## Option A: The Hallmarks of Fake News

1) Engage students in a "deeper dive" into fake news, starting with having them work through a few of the questions in the Factitious game, which provides sources and asks readers to decide whether each source is fake or real: http://factitious.augamestudio.com. Debrief by asking students to report on reasons for their successes and failures in answering the questions.

2) Have students read one of the excellent articles online about the hallmarks of fake news, such as:

   – "How to Spot Fake News," by Eugene Kiely and Lori Robertson, FactCheck.org (November 18, 2016), http://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/.

3) When students have read the article, discuss the "hallmarks" of fake news that it describes. Then ask students to conduct a scavenger hunt on the Internet, looking for examples of fake news that bear these hallmarks. Set a limited time for students' searching. When the time is up, ask them to share what they found. With each site shared, ask students to consider whether they would have believed or shared the site if they hadn't been specifically thinking about fake news.

4) Point out that, while untrue stories and propaganda have been around for many years, the Internet and social media have made it much easier to spread fake news quickly. It made publishing fake news almost free; made distribution through sharing on social media rapid and free; and allowed people who create and publish fake news to generate money through advertising. These factors combined to make fake news a significant factor in the 2016 election.

   – Why should we care if people believe fake news?

     *Answers will vary. If students don't raise the following point, be sure to mention it: Because making good decisions as citizens in a democracy requires us to have accurate information about problems, proposed solutions, and candidates' positions.*

5) Challenge students to consider what can be done about fake news—without violating the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech and of the press. Organize students into work groups, assigning each group to come up with one way to address the problem of fake news. They may think about what can be done by sites like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Reddit; by advertisers; by consumers; or by political leaders. If they have trouble thinking of ideas, you may refer them to an article that discusses responses to fake news such as:

   – "What Is Fake News? How to Spot It and What You Can Do to Stop It," by Elle Hunt, The Guardian (December 17, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/dec/18/what-is-fake-news-pizzagate.

6) Encourage students to prepare "proposals" that outline one action that can be taken against fake news and email or post these proposals to the appropriate people, companies, or sites.

## Option B: When Fake News Isn't Fake

1) The increasing attention to fake news has led to another potentially problematic phenomenon— the labeling of legitimate news that one disagrees with as "fake news." Ask:

   – Why do you think this trend could be a problem?

2) To help students answer this question, share with students the visual, **U.S. Adults' Views of the News** (available at the end of this lesson plan), which highlights results of a study by the Pew

Research Center that looked at how many people today trust the media. (You might want to paste this graphic into presentation software.)

> Guide students in analyzing the data on the visual, by asking: How much do Americans trust the news media? What explanation would you give for the level of trust shown here? Then discuss possible explanations for the lack of trust. While there are other reasons for this lack of trust—political polarization and perceptions of bias—labeling stories as fake because one disagrees with them adds to this lack of trust. Discuss why lack of trust in media might be a problem (if no information is reliable, how will citizens evaluate the decisions they need to make?).

3) Share the following story with students:

On February 8, 2017, the *Grand Junction* (CO) *Sentinel* published an editorial—an opinion piece—supporting a bill providing better access to public records for journalists and others. The editorial called on the community's state senator, Ray Scott, who had postponed a hearing and vote on the bill, to move the bill forward.

Senator Scott responded on Twitter and Facebook, calling the editorial "fake news." The paper's publisher, Jay Seaton, was not amused. He said, "I'm accustomed to all kinds of criticism for what we do; that comes with the job." But calling the editorial "fake news," he went on, is "an attempt to undermine the speaker. That's where this bumps up against the First Amendment. When you've got a government actor who doesn't like something he's seen and tries to diminish its credibility, then you've got real problems." Seaton said he was considering suing Senator Scott for defamation.

4) Ask students to take the role of legal advisers to *The Sentinel*. Do they think the newspaper has a case? What would be gained by bringing such a lawsuit highlighting false claims of fake news? What might the media lose from such a case? The article below may be useful in their discussions:

   – Birkeland, Bente, "When a Politician Says 'Fake News' and a Newspaper Threatens to Sue Back," NPR (February 17, 2017), http://www.npr.org/2017/02/17/515760101/when-a-politician-says-fake-news-and-a-newspaper-threatens-to-sue-back.

5) Debrief the activity by again focusing on what can be done to stop the labeling of news politicians disagree with as "fake news."

## Option C: Fair and Balanced

**Note:** This activity requires you to choose news stories from the last few days or to assign students to bring articles.

1) Share with students that every journalist brings his/her own personal perspective to the job of reporting the news; these perspectives can influence how the news is reported, even when the

journalist is doing his/her best to report the news objectively. Companies that publish newspapers or magazines or host websites may also have points of view they intentionally or unintentionally apply when shaping the news. Distribute **Handout 5: How Bias Creeps into the News** and go over the information with students. Assign students to compare the day's presentation of news from two news sources generally regarded as having different perspectives (e.g., MSNBC and FoxNews or *The Nation* and *National Review*) to look for evidence of differences in each of the factors from the handout.

2) Debrief the activity by discussing when bias was most difficult to identify and how students feel after examining different takes on the day's news. Do they gain anything by looking at both sources? How could they judge whether the information presented in either source is accurate or useful?

## Sources

– Birkeland, Bente, "When a Politician Says 'Fake News' and a Newspaper Threatens to Sue Back," National Public Radio: Politics (February 17, 2017), http://www.npr.org/2017/02/17/515760101/when-a-politician-says-fake-news-and-a-newspaper-threatens-to-sue-back.

– Farley, Maggie, and Bob Hone, Factitious, American University Game Lab (2017), http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/.

– Foreman, Gene, "What Is Driving the Rise of 'Fake News," and News Literacy Lessons to Spot It," The News Literacy Project (December 15, 2016), http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/news/teachable-moments/what-driving-rise-%E2%80%98fake-news%E2%80%99-and-news-literacy-lessons-spot-it.

– Kang, Cecilia, and Adam Goldman, "In Washington Pizzeria Attack, Fake News Brought Real Guns," New York Times (December 5, 2016), https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/05/business/media/comet-ping-pong-pizza-shooting-fake-news-consequences.html.

– Kennedy, Merrit, "'Pizzagate' Gunman Sentenced to 4 Years in Prison," National Public Radio (June 22, 2017), http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/06/22/533941689/pizzagate-gunman-sentenced-to-4-years-in-prison.

– Mitchell, Amy et al., "The Modern News Consumer," Pew Research Center (July 7, 2016), http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer.

– Uhrmacher, Kevin, Kevin Schaul, and Samuel Granados, "Seven Telling Moments in the Cable News Coverage of Comey's Hearing," *Washington Post* (June 9, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/09/seven-telling-moments-in-the-cable-news-coverage-of-the-comey-hearing/?utm_term=.d71e585f72ca.

– Vavreck, Lynn, "A Superhero Power for Our Time: How to Handle the Truth," *New York Times* (June 20, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/20/upshot/a-superhero-power-for-our-time-how-to-handle-the-truth.html?_r=0.

– Word Choice Buffet: All You Can Eat, New Bias Explored, University of Michigan, n.d., http://umich.edu/~newsbias/wordchoice.html.

# Handout 1: A Fake News Case Study

## Definitions

**_Reporting:_** The process of developing a factual account of an event or situation through observation and investigation.

**_Fake news:_** False information intentionally made up and formatted to look like real news. The purpose of the false information is to deceive the consumer. Fake news stories are invented, not reported.

**_Propaganda:_** Information, often false or misleading, that is spread to promote a certain view of an institution, person, or group.

## Fake News Case Study

Edgar Welch lived in North Carolina. In December 2016, he spent three days reading websites about a Satanic child sex trafficking ring that was allegedly being run out of a Washington, DC, pizzeria called Comet Ping Pong. According to the websites he was reading, the ring was being run by top Democrats, including Hillary Clinton.

News sites like _The New York Times_ and fact-checking sites like _Snopes_ investigated the story and said it was untrue. But the story continued to spread. A tweet about the supposed crime from a fake Congressperson from Georgia was forwarded numerous times.

Welch got so upset about the stories that he decided to drive to Washington to "investigate." When he entered the pizzeria, numerous customers, including many children, were eating there. He was carrying a rifle and had a pistol and a knife with him. Welch looked around and shot a lock off the door to a closet. Some workers and customers ran out of the restaurant in fear for their lives.

When Welch found no evidence of children being held against their will, he surrendered to the police. In June 2017, he pled guilty to assault with a dangerous weapon and transporting a firearm over state lines. He was sentenced to four years in prison.

There is no evidence that Democrats were running a child sex ring out of the pizza place. The story was fake news. Yet some people on social media continued to spread false information about the pizzeria. They even posted that Welch was an actor hired to distract from the child abuse story.

## Questions for Discussion

1) What are the facts of the case?

2) Does the story about child trafficking at the pizza restaurant meet the definition of fake news?

3) What caused Edgar Welch to go to the pizzeria with multiple weapons? What role did fake news play? What role do you think Welch's personality and ideas played in his actions?

4) Why is being able to recognize fake news important?

5) Why do you think it is so hard to change people's minds when they believe a false story?

6) Do you have trouble changing your mind once you believe something is true?

# Handout 2: What is Reliable?

We can classify information you see in the news into five categories:

- **News Reporting:** Reporters have observed and investigated to uncover the facts. Editors have checked the reporters' work.

- **Fake News:** People who create and spread fake news publish false information intentionally made up to deceive others.

- **Satire:** Satire is a form of humor that aims to get people to think about the news by making fun of people or events in the news. Some satire is designed to look like the news stories it mocks.

- **Reporting with Errors:** Reporters and editors make mistakes. These errors should be corrected when the mistake is discovered. Citing more than one named source for particular facts is one way to avoid errors.

- **Biased Reporting:** Reporters, commentators, or editors present stories from a particular point of view. Some stories, like editorials or commentary, are designed to present a certain bias. Other times, bias gets into news reporting. Reporters or editors choose to include information favorable to their point of view. They cover the stories that are most important from their perspective.

Write the names of each of the five categories on the continuum below to show how reliable (trustworthy) or unreliable each type of news is.

$\longleftarrow \hspace{10cm} \longrightarrow$

**Unreliable**                                                                                      **Reliable**

# Handout 3: Tool for Analyzing News Sources

**Directions:** This tool is a series of questions that will help you determine if a news story is reliable. Work with a partner to apply these questions to the news story your teacher has given you or one of your own choosing. Together, determine whether the source is reliable reporting, biased reporting, or fake news. If you are able, identify any errors in the reporting.

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**Title:**

*Write the name of the article or page title here. If a website, include the URL.*

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**Evaluating the Source and Author**

1. What is the name of the publication, broadcaster, or website where you found the story?

2. Is this a reputable source? *Don't consider who sent you the source—even your friends can make mistakes!* Explore the source to find out:
   a. *Does it identify itself as satirical?*

   b. *Who produces the site and what is their goal? (Lack of information is a bad sign!)*

   c. *Conduct a search using the name of the site as a keyword. What have others said about the site?*

   d. *Does it appear on one of the lists of fake news websites? (Wikipedia and Politifact are two sites that publish lists of fake news websites.)*

3. Is the author identified? *Unsigned articles, especially on websites that you cannot find much information about, are questionable.*

4. What are the author's qualifications? Does he or she have expertise in this area?

5. When was the information published? Has it been corrected or updated since its original publication?

**Assessing the Content**

6. Is the content mostly fact or opinion? *This can be difficult to determine*. **Remember: Facts are pieces of information that can be verified. Opinions are views or judgments that may be based on facts.** *Words that appeal to your emotions are a signal that the source includes opinions.*

7. Are the facts or opinions supported with evidence? Does the author make his/her research clear?

8. Can you verify the facts presented in other sources*? Be sure that other sources you check are not simply referring to the source you are evaluating. Sites like Snopes, FactCheck.org, and Hoax-Slayer can be useful in checking content.*

9. Are the author's assumptions clear and reasonable? Are there errors or omissions—facts that are left out—that raise your suspicions?

10. Is the source well-written? Is it well-organized and carefully presented?

11. What is the headline/title? Does it use caps or exclamation points? Is it descriptive or does it try to convince you to read/watch more by being mysterious? Does it make outrageous claims (e.g., a local politician is headed for prison)?

12. How does the story use pictures or videos? What message do the visuals convey? Conduct an image search for the picture. *(If you aren't sure how to do that, check this site: https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?hl=en.) This may help you identify who else has used the visual (whether all the sources have a similar bias) or whether the visual has been edited to convey a certain perspective.*

**Thinking about Your Response or Reaction**

13. How does the story make you feel? Does it support or challenge your views? How does that affect your response?

**Summary**

Do you think this source is (circle one):

**Fake News**          **Biased**          **Reliable reporting**

Give three specific reasons to support your claim, using the factors above. If possible, mention the place where the evidence appears in the article.

# Handout 4: What Would You Do?

**Dilemma 1:** On social media, you see a funny photo and headline about an advisor to the President that your friend has shared. You aren't 100 percent sure that the story is true—it's kind of far-fetched, so it may be a joke. But it's been shared/forwarded more than 20,000 times by people who are obviously mad about it. What would you do?

    a.   Forward the post—20,000 people can't be wrong.
    b.   Do some research to find out if the post is true.
    c.   Ignore the post and move on.

**Dilemma 2:** You do the research about the post in Dilemma 1 and find out it's a satire. What will you do?

    a.   Respond to your friend's post, pointing out that the story is not true and giving your sources.
    b.   Message your friend to tell him/her that the story is not true and suggesting he/she delete the post.
    c.   Ignore the post and move on.

**Dilemma 3:** You're at your aunt's house. Your cousins are talking about a police shooting that has been in the news. The information they have is different from what you heard. What will you do?

    a.   Ask your cousins where they got their information and share what you have heard and what your source is. With your cousins, try to figure out what information is accurate.
    b.   Say nothing. When you get home, do some more research on the case and then post what you have learned on social media.
    c.   Tell your cousins their sources are biased and they ought to check out some other sources before talking about the case.

**Dilemma 4:** You are working on a research project about Twitter's role in the 2016 election. You come across some tweets about Election Day polls that look like they are from a real news site: @CNN_Politics. But the numbers seem way off. What will you do?

    a.   Use the tweets in your paper without mentioning that they could be "fake news." They were out there on Election Day, so even if they were fake, they became part of the story. Plus, you're not sure how to figure out if they're fake.
    b.   Don't use the tweets. You're not sure how to figure out if they're fake, so ignoring them is the easiest and safest thing to do.
    c.   Google the Twitter handle (the user's name—what appears after the @). If you don't find anything, keep digging. Knowing whether this news is fake or not is part of the story you are researching.

# Visual: U.S. Adults' Trust in the News
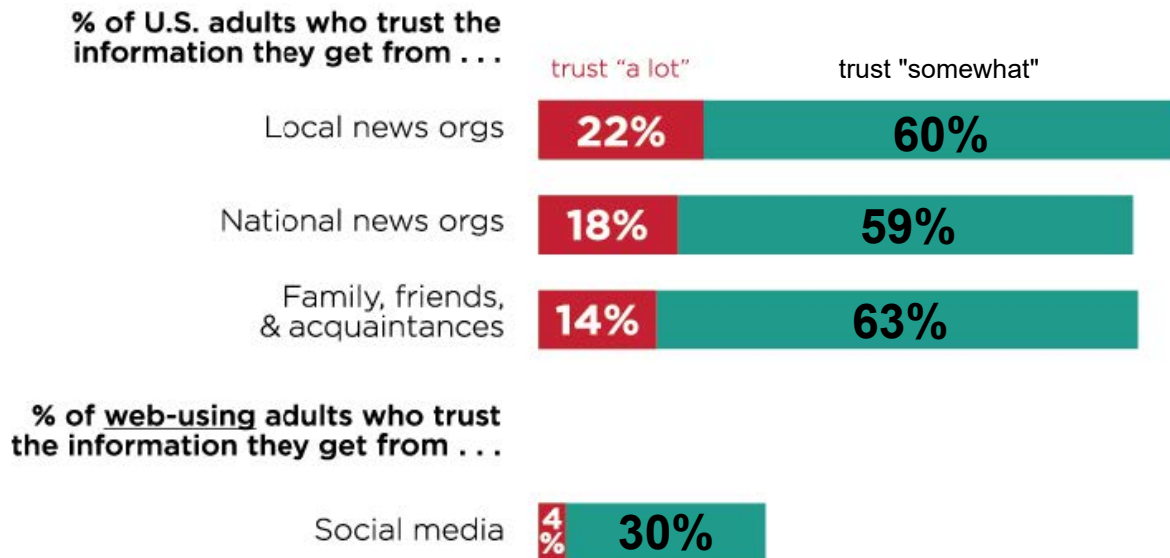


Source: Mitchell, Amy et al., "The Modern News Consumer," Pew Research Center (July 7, 2016), http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer.

# Handout 5: How Bias Creeps into the News

The attitudes and background that reporters, editors, and even photographers bring to a story influence how they present it. The "bias" that creeps into the news may be completely unintentional—or it may be by design. Either way, the news consumer should look for the following ways that bias can creep into the news.

**Bias by Omission and Selection**

The stories a news source chooses to publish reflect what they want consumers to know or what they think is important. The same is true of the details they choose to include in a story. For example, one source might stress the size of the crowd at a protest, while the other side might not mention it, depending on whether the sources want to make people believe the protest is important or unimportant.

**Bias by Placement**

Stories can be placed on the front page of a newspaper or the home page of a website—or they can be buried in the back. Television and radio broadcasts place some stories first, other stories later. Placement decisions may reflect bias.

**Biased Headlines**

Headlines are designed to grab attention—and they are the most-read part of a newspaper. They can summarize a story, but they can also express a point of view about the story.

**Bias by Word Choice and Tone**

The words used to describe an event can convey a strong perspective. For example, calling an attack on a mosque an "act of terror" carries a different message than calling it a "hate crime"—though both reflect points of view. Be alert for emotional language designed to evoke a response in the reader/listener. Also look at the ways people are labeled. Calling someone a "convicted felon" presents a different point of view than describing the person as "having turned his life around after some early problems with the law."

**Biased Visuals**

Photographs can be composed (or digitally edited) to make a person look friendly, scary, or unkempt. They can be taken from different angles that present different information about an event. The photos a source chooses to illustrate a story may show bias. The captions may also convey a point of view.

Inspired by *Newskit: A Consumer's Guide to News Media,* by Jeffrey Schrank, Learning Seed Company (1978).