

Fact and Fiction

There are many types of material produced in our digital age that are meant to persuade consumers, to sell products, or to exploit big issues—some more dangerous than others. An article that looks like news but is actually an advertisement for a new shopping mall is not as dangerous as an article that appears to be objective but is actually propaganda meant to influence a local election. Once you understand the varieties of non-news content and disinformation out there, you're on your way to becoming an informed reader of news.

INSTRUCTIONS Below, use what you learned in class to fill in the definition for each kind. Then, provide an example of that category of content that you have seen or read. If an example does not come to mind, imagine an example that would fit the description.

DEFINITIONS	EXAMPLES
■ <i>Propaganda</i> _____ _____ _____	<i>Example</i> _____ _____ _____
■ <i>Hoax</i> _____ _____ _____	<i>Example</i> _____ _____ _____
■ <i>Agenda-Based Misrepresentation</i> _____ _____ _____	<i>Example</i> _____ _____ _____
■ <i>Circular Reporting</i> _____ _____ _____	<i>Example</i> _____ _____ _____
■ <i>Clickbait</i> _____ _____ _____	<i>Example</i> _____ _____ _____
■ <i>Advertisements or Sponsored Content</i> _____ _____ _____	<i>Example</i> _____ _____ _____

Be an Active News Consumer

Spotting an artificial version of something can be hard. Counterfeit dollar bills are made to look identical to real currency. Pieces of forged art have been sold for millions of dollars. And spotting disinformation disguised to look like credible journalism can be tricky. At first, anyway.

Fortunately, there are ways to look at news that help us tell serious journalism from other kinds of content. In the spaces below, paraphrase a piece of disinformation or non-news content and an example of credible journalism, both of which you'll find online. Include a source for each, but don't label which is which (for now). Later, you will challenge a partner to figure out which is the credible reporting and which isn't.

News Story #1

News Story #2

When analyzing a piece of news, ask yourself what you know about the following:

AUTHORSHIP | FORMAT | AUDIENCE | CONTENT | PURPOSE OF MESSAGE

Fighting Fiction With Facts

In our modern times, disinformation is spreading fast. But there is a good way to fight it: We can do a better job of focusing on the facts. In this activity, you and your team will become journalists for a day and dig up the facts for a big story.

Use this sheet to organize your efforts. Follow the steps below.

- 1. Choose a story.** Spend a few minutes brainstorming a list of current events that interest you. (This is often what editors do in newsrooms.) It can be of any scope you like: local, national, or global. Select the topic you think would make the best news story. Perhaps your topic is an event that is unfolding overseas or a confusing trend in pop culture. It's up to you!

TOPIC: _____

- 2. Pose questions** to guide your research. Using the "Five W's" is often a good way to start. These can kick-start your research.

- **Who** is involved?
- **What** is happening? What is at stake?
- **When** did this happen?
- **Where** did this happen?
- **Why** is this happening?

- 3. Do your own original reporting.** Be sure to use reliable sources and to avoid secondhand information. Also, government reports and press statements that are fact-checked are better sources than an opinion piece in a newspaper. Divide the work among yourselves so that everyone is tackling a different side of the story. Use at least four or five sources to support your story.

- 4. Write the article** in an engaging but factual way. Remember, facts first. Most news articles include these elements:

- A **lead sentence** to grab your reader's attention.
- A short **introduction** to set the scene and give the reader an idea of what the story is about.
- The **main body** of the article should provide facts and more details on the story's topic.
- **Quotations** help to breathe life into a piece.
- **Sources**, when not kept confidential for legal or other sensitive reasons, should be carefully cited throughout.
- A **conclusion** to wrap up the main points of the article.

- 5. Edit, edit, edit.** The best writing is often the most heavily edited writing. Team members should edit each other's work rather than their own.

- 6. Publish.** Add a visual component to your article, if possible. This might include a photograph, chart, graph, or video. Assemble your text and visuals in a compelling layout—either online or in print—and distribute it to your readers.

Congratulations, you've just produced credible journalism. You can distinguish it from disinformation because it has sources, facts, and objectivity. Plus, you can be proud of it for leaving your readers more informed. This is what happens when you put facts first!

TOP 3 RESEARCH TIPS

1. Use primary sources!

A primary source is the original record—a firsthand witness's account, court transcripts, or a credible scientific study. Many news reports are valuable sources of firsthand accounts.

2. Take notes!

The more notes you take, the more material you'll have for your article.

3. Cite your research!

Retain and cite all pertinent information about any reports or studies you use, and be careful to accurately record names, titles, and contact information for sources.

The Responsibilities of the Media

Disinformation is spreading fast in our digital era, but it can't stand up to the scrutiny of serious journalism.

Grab a camera and make your own story exposing the phenomenon of how quickly this type of content can spread. The story should include at least five facts about disinformation and one persuasive argument about it. Use the Production Notes below to plan your video.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

1. Assign jobs (executive producer, news writers, camera operator, video editor, anchors):
2. Write a script. (A good script avoids overly formal language and is written as if you're speaking. It features a well-researched topic and clear transitions between speakers. Don't forget to remain objective and cite sources.)
3. Edit your script (fact-check, cut for length if needed, and be sure to read it aloud so that it sounds good).
4. Choose a location (whether indoors or outdoors, it should be quiet).
5. Develop equipment list (smartphone or video camera, perhaps a tripod, microphone, lighting, and teleprompter app):
6. Film it! (Anchors should be articulate and energetic.)
7. Edit it! (Cut the clip for length and smoothness.)