

False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical “News” Sources

Some of contents of this educational resource/google document, specifically the list of potential false, misleading, clickbait-y, and/or satirical news sources, have been removed in order for it to be transferred to and expanded on in a more permanent, dynamic, and collaborative home. This page will reflect updates as they become available.

Tips for analyzing news sources:

- Avoid websites that end in “lo” ex: Newslo. These sites take pieces of accurate information and then packaging that information with other false or misleading “facts” (sometimes for the purposes of satire or comedy).
- Watch out for websites that end in “.com.co” as they are often fake versions of real news sources
- Watch out if known/reputable news sites are not also reporting on the story. Sometimes lack of coverage is the result of corporate media bias and other factors, but there should typically be more than one source reporting on a topic or event.
- Odd domain names generally equal odd and rarely truthful news.
- Lack of author attribution may, but not always, signify that the news story is suspect and requires verification.
- Some news organizations are also letting bloggers post under the banner of particular news brands; however, many of these posts do not go through the same editing process (ex: BuzzFeed Community Posts, Kinja blogs, *Forbes* blogs).
- Check the “About Us” tab on websites or look up the website on Snopes or Wikipedia for more information about the source.
- Bad web design and use of ALL CAPS can also be a sign that the source you’re looking at should be verified and/or read in conjunction with other sources.
- If the story makes you REALLY ANGRY it’s probably a good idea to keep reading about the topic via other sources to make sure the story you read wasn’t purposefully trying to make you angry (with potentially misleading or false information) in order to generate shares and ad revenue.
- If the website you’re reading encourages you to DOX individuals, it’s unlikely to be a legitimate source of news.
- It’s always best to read multiple sources of information to get a variety of viewpoints and media frames. Some sources not yet included in this list (although their practices at times may qualify them for addition), such as *The Daily Kos*, *The Huffington Post*, and Fox News, vacillate between providing important, legitimate, problematic, and/or hyperbolic news coverage, requiring readers and viewers to verify and contextualize information with other sources.
- For more tips on analyzing the credibility and reliability of sources, [please check out School Library Journal](#) (they also provide an extensive list of media literacy resources) and the [Digital Resource Center](#).

Potential Steps for Analyzing Websites:

Step 1: Title/Domain Analysis . If “.wordpress” “.com.co” appear in the title -- or any slight variation on a well known website-- this is usually a sign there is a problem.

Step 2: About Us Analysis. I usually google every title/domain name/anyone listed in the “About Us” section to see if anyone has previously reported on the website (snopes, hoax-slayer, politifact, factcheck.org, etc.) or whether it has a wikipedia page or something similar detailing its background. This is useful for identifying and correctly categorizing lesser known and/or new websites that may be on the up-and-up, such as satirical sources or websites that are explicit about their political orientation. Then I look for information about the credentials and backgrounds of affiliated writers (is it a content mill or do they pay their writers?), editors, publishers, and domain owners (who.is etc.).

Step 3: Source Analysis . Does the website mention/link to a study or source? Look up the source/study. Do you think it’s being accurately reflected and reported? Are officials being cited? Can you confirm their quotes elsewhere? Some media literacy and critical scholars call this triangulation: Verify details, facts, quotes, etc. with multiple sources.

Step 4: Writing Style Analysis . Does the website follow AP Style Guide? Typically, lack of style guide use signifies questionable, more opinion-oriented practices, and may indicate an overall lack of editing or fact-checking process. Does it frequently use ALL CAPS in headlines and/or body text? Does the headline or body of the text use words like WOW!, SLAUGHTER!, DESTROY!? This stylistic practice and these types of hyperbolic word choices are often used to create emotional responses with readers that is avoided in more traditional journalism and isn’t something that would be permitted or encouraged by the AP Style Guide

Step 5: Aesthetic Analysis . Like the style-guide, many fake and questionable news sites utilize very bad design. This is kind of a “I know it when I see it” type thing, but usually the screens are cluttered and they use heavy-handed photoshopping or born digital images.

Step 6: Social Media Analysis. Look up the website on Facebook. Do the headlines and posts rely on sensational or provocative language-- aka clickbait-- in order to attract attention and encourage likes, clickthroughs, and shares? Do the headlines and social media descriptions match or accurately reflect the content of the linked article? (this step isn’t particularly good at helping us find fake news, but it can help us identify other misleading news sources)