

Worksheet 2.2:

Reliable versus False – How to spot false information online



There are a number of things to watch out for when evaluating content online.



1. Check the source

Check the source of the story, do you recognise the website? Is it a credible/reliable source? If you are unfamiliar with the site, look in the about section or find out more information about the author, date, time, URL.



2. Look beyond the headline

Check the entire article. To grab attention, false information often uses sensationalist or shocking clickbait headlines – sometimes all caps and using exclamation points. False information can also contain incorrect dates or altered timelines. It is also a good idea to check when the article was published, is it current or an old news story? It's also a good idea to see if the information is attributed to an author, or if quotes are attributed to real people or unnamed sources.



3. Check other sources

Probably the most reliable way to 'fact-check' information is to cross-reference it with other sources. Ask yourself whether other reputable news/media outlets are reporting on the story. Check whether there are any sources in the story. If so, check that they are reliable or if they even exist! Try to find the earliest and most local source for the story.



4. Is it fact or opinion?

The language used in the piece might help you identify whether something is written as fact (something that is proven to be true) or opinion (someone's personal belief). For example factual statements might include words such as "The annual report confirms... Scientists have recently discovered... According to the results of the tests... The investigation demonstrated..."

Whereas opinion pieces might use statements such as "He claimed that... It is the officer's view that... Many scientists suspect that... I believe..." or could pose questions such as "Could this really be possible ...?". Remember, you are entitled to your own opinion but not your own facts.



5. Check your biases

Are your own views or beliefs affecting your judgement of a news feature or report? We are even more likely to accept or ignore things depending on whether or not they support what we already believe.



6. Is it a joke?

Satirical sites like Waterford Whispers are popular online and sometimes it is not always clear whether a story is just a joke or parody... Check the website, is it known for satire or creating funny stories or is the social media account marked as a 'parody' account?



7. Check a fact-checking site

Sites like Snopes: www.snopes.com; PolitiFact: politifact.com; Fact Check: factcheck.org can be a great shortcut to find out if a story has already been debunked – or if a too-good-to-be-true story really was true after all.

For pictures, you can do a reverse search for images at TinEye (www.tineye.com) or Google Reverse Image Search (www.images.google.com). This will tell you where else the picture has appeared, and also show you similar pictures (which is a good way to find out if it has been photoshopped).

Then before you believe it or share it:

Check your own instincts – does it seem likely to be true, is it accurate and helpful, is it fair to share?

Visit Be Media Smart for more information:
www.bemediasmart.ie