

GET YOUR JUDGE ON



YOU'VE read a lot about fake news in this issue, but what's the single best way to stop yourself being fooled by it? Learn how to spot it!

It's now more important than ever to be able to pick out fake stories from the hundreds we read every week. Many researchers say that fake news is destroying trust in governments and previously respected news organisations. A report from the RAND Corporation described this as "truth decay" and says the US is becoming paralysed due to "increasing disagreement about facts and a blurring between opinion and fact".

In the UK, we helped out with a parliamentary investigation called the Commission On Fake News And The Teaching Of Critical Literacy Skills. The final report showed

that half of children are worried about not being able to spot fake news, and that "only 2% of children have the critical literacy skills they need to tell whether a news story is real or fake".

That statistic may sound alarming, but kids certainly aren't alone – it's become clear lately that an awful lot of adults are incapable of telling the difference themselves.

Anyway, we know you're all smart enough to see through phoney stories – you just need to know how. So here's a handy guide that'll teach you how to sort the sense from the nonsense and the garbage from the truthage*.

Lesson 1

You can't always trust search engines (or friends!)

Search engines like Google or Bing are fantastic ways of finding what you want, but many people assume that search results only include trusted pages, true stories and honest shopping sites.

Search engines rely on algorithms (computer programs) to sort out which pages are probably going to help you, but there isn't a real person looking at those results to see whether you're

being given reliable sources. New websites spring up all the time, and people can artificially increase page views to trick search engines into thinking it's a good site.

And bear in mind that just because your best friend forwarded you something, that doesn't mean you can trust it. Maybe they didn't check it properly and might be sending you something that's junk!



Lesson 2

Is the site or source trustworthy?

Any time you're reading a new website or newspaper, you should always ask yourself if it's reliable. Have you heard of it before? How long has it been going? Do people trust it? If you don't know, ask a parent or teacher what they think, or do some research. Search the name of the website to see



Not all websites are trustworthy

what you can find out about it, and see what sort of reputation it has.

We don't want to tell you which newspapers, websites or TV news programmes to look at. That's partly because it's a matter of opinion, but also because many people's political biases determine who they trust (see p16). We'd prefer to let you use your own judgement, but there are certain organisations that have built up good reputations over a number of years, such as the BBC and CBBC's Newsround. But Sky News, the regional ITV channels and Channel 4 are also all generally seen as being quality news organisations. In America, there's much more of a problem, as news channels can be very one-sided and get criticised for not telling the whole story.

Hopefully you think that *First News*



BBC News has a good reputation for being impartial (not biased)

is a trusted newspaper, but if you ever want to have a look at some adult papers, *The Times* and *The Guardian* are probably seen by most people as being high-quality papers

that are pretty fair. Plus *The Guardian* is a Labour-supporting paper, while *The Times* is more on the side of the Conservatives, so you'll get differing opinions from them.

*okay, okay, truthage isn't a real word, but we quite like it. Anyway, let's call that our first test; we hope you spotted that fake word!

Lesson 3



Can you find the story anywhere else?

If you see a story on social media that seems incredibly shocking or outrageous, check if it's on any respectable news sites. It could be possible that you're reading the only report of the story, but these days it's pretty unlikely that you won't be able to find something mentioned elsewhere on sites like Google News, BBC News or Twitter if it's a genuine news story.

Also check whether it's news or opinion, as there is a big difference. News should rely on facts, whereas opinion pieces are, well, opinion.

Lesson 4

Do they list their sources?

When you read a story or quote online, there'll often be hyperlinks to sources, or links at the end of the article. Are they genuine? Do the links show what's claimed? Check them out and see. If there's an unbelievable quote from someone, Google it to see if it's correct or if its meaning has been changed.

Lesson 5

Don't be fooled by a joke!

As we've mentioned elsewhere in this issue, journalists themselves have fallen victim to joke



news stories, so make sure you don't join them! The web has several comedy sites that are full of realistic-looking news stories that poke fun at current events, so be careful!

Lesson 6

Who's the author?

Is the author a proper journalist? Search their name to find out, and see what else they've written. Are they constantly writing stories that sound unbelievable?

Are their articles on genuine news sites?

And is it genuinely them? There are lots of spoof accounts on sites like Twitter, so check to see. Official Twitter accounts of many celebs or politicians have blue ticks to indicate that they're genuine, so make sure you're not reading a tweet from an impostor.



Lesson 7

Does the story justify the headline?

Websites often have shocking headlines that they use to draw people in and increase the number of clicks on their

site, as this helps them to make more money from advertising. But do the facts in the story back up what the headline claims? It's not always the case, so make sure you read to the end rather than basing your opinion on the headline and the introduction.



Lesson 8



Check your facts

In recent years, several fact-checking organisations have been set up to try to counter the effects of fake news. There aren't any just for kids, but there are plenty of sites that you could look at with a teacher or parent if you want to investigate the truth about a story or something that a politician has claimed, for instance.

Here are some good ones that you can try:

- fullfact.org
- bbc.co.uk/realitycheck
- channel4.com/news/factcheck

Lesson 9

Pictures can lie!

It can be hard to tell if a picture has been faked, especially if it's been done by someone who knows what they're doing. Software such as Photoshop can be used to adjust and combine images so that they show events that never happened or people who were never together, and spotting it is tricky. This is especially true on the internet and social media, because with small, low-quality images it makes it even harder to tell whether they've been altered in any way.

In case you're wondering, most of the current affairs and sport pictures in First News come from Getty, one of the world's biggest photo agencies. They have lots of trusted photographers and experts who can spot any dodgy pictures, so we're in safe hands!

But if you ever see a picture online and want to check if it's genuine, there are some websites and tools that can help you if you want to do some investigating of your own:

■ **Google Images** – just go to google.co.uk and click the 'images' link in the top right. From there, you can upload a picture and search for anywhere else that it appears on the web.

■ **www.tineye.com** – this search engine also lets you upload a picture, and you can filter it to show the oldest results, which lets you see when the picture was first uploaded. That's useful because some fake news stories use real photos, but lie about when they were taken. You can also see how big the pictures are, which means you can find the biggest one available and study it more closely.

■ **Photoshop** – this is an expensive photo-editing tool that's used by lots of designers (including the ones at First News who designed this issue). If you can find a high enough quality image then you can open it in Photoshop to zoom in and adjust the brightness and contrast levels to help you see any areas that have been tampered with. Not many people are likely to have the full version of Photoshop, but there are lots of good free alternatives available, such as **GIMP** or **Pixlr**.

■ **fotoforensics.com** – this site lets you upload an image and analyse it. Some of it is a bit complicated, but it's explained quite well and there are tutorials and examples that help you to find what you should be looking out for.



Two of the web's most famous faked pictures. The dramatic shark attack picture is actually a combination of two images, so the shark and helicopter were never near each other. They weren't even in the same country! The scary bear is really from a picture library and was added into this set-up picture as a joke for friends and family.

The four men were scouting a location for a film and decided to have a laugh by posting their fake picture to Facebook, but it quickly went viral

