

EVERYDAY LIFE

FAKE NEWS

Age: Teen/Adult

Level: Intermediate + (B1+)

Time: 60–90 minutes

Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. share their attitudes and opinions on fake news;
2. practise identifying common features of fake news articles;
3. design an infographic related to fake news / write their own fake news article (optional)

Language focus: Vocabulary related to digital literacy (*source, fact, claim*, etc)

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; one reading text per student.

Note: The tasks in this lesson can be undertaken with or without the support of technology. Access to the internet would enhance some activities, such as when students analyse a fake news text, but it is not a necessity.

PROCEDURE

Exercise 1

a. Students discuss the questions in pairs. If they are unclear on the meaning of the term 'fake news', direct them to the 'info' box, which contains a definition taken from the *Macmillan Dictionary*. This stage activates prior knowledge and personal experiences related to the topic.

b. This task introduces the importance of reliable sources early in the lesson. Students think critically about each source and how trustworthy it might be. The options are leading the learners towards certain ideas mentioned later in the lesson, such as the importance of up-to-date information, possible bias, clickbait, etc.

You could make this a pyramid discussion (*think alone, then in pairs, then as a group*) leading to a class discussion. There is no right or wrong (at this stage), just students' own opinions.

Exercise 2

a. and b. These exercises pre-teach some words and phrases appearing in the table of tips for identifying reliable information online. Exercise 2 is a flexi-stage for optional support – it can be omitted if you feel most of the vocabulary is known, or if you would prefer learners to be more challenged.

Key (b):

1. grab ... attention
2. source
3. biased
4. If in doubt
5. fact
6. familiar with
7. confirmed
8. claimed
9. headlines

Exercise 2 - Extension

If the vocabulary seems straightforward for your learners, you could have them do the following extension tasks:

Related to question 2: What are primary sources and secondary sources of information? If you're not sure, search online.

Related to question 3: Have you ever heard of 'confirmation bias'? If not, search online for a definition. Do you think you suffer from confirmation bias at times?

Related to question 5: Who discovered that the Earth orbited the sun? What did people believe before that?

Key:

2. **Primary sources** = original sources of information that were created at the time.

Secondary sources = interpretations, analysis or summaries of primary sources.

3. **Confirmation bias** = the human tendency to think that new evidence confirms one's existing ideas and beliefs.

5. **Nicholas Copernicus**. Prior to his discovery, people believed that the sun orbited the Earth and that the Earth was the centre of the universe.

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TOP TIP: The procedure listed on the handout in Exercise 2a is sometimes referred to as 'Brain, Buddy, Boss'. This encourages independent work. First, learners think for themselves. Then, if they are still unsure, they ask a friend. If they are still unsure, they can ask 'the Boss' (i.e the teacher). An additional stage is sometimes mentioned, 'Brain, Book, Buddy, Boss', where learners are encouraged to research answers themselves. This acronym may be worth teaching if you use this resource with teens, although the idea of the teacher as a 'boss' in class is a bit strong. Why not make the process 'B.L.T – Brain, (other) Learners, Teacher'? Then you can display an image of a B.L.T. sandwich in class to remind students what to do. This might make them hungry though. . . .



Exercise 3

a. This resource has been adapted from information on factcheck.org. Students match the tip title to the correct description.

Key:

1. Think about the source
2. Keep reading ...
3. Check the author
4. Supporting sources
5. Check the date
6. Is it a joke?
7. Are you biased?
8. Ask the experts

b. This activity is a chance for learners to apply some of the tips they've just learnt. Instruct them to return to Exercise 1b. They look again at the sources and discuss why these may/may not be reliable, referring to examples from the table to help them.

Key (possible answers):

a page about penguins on Wikipedia: *the source of Wikipedia is ... anyone. It is a peer-reviewed encyclopaedia, and is not accepted as a source on things like academic courses.*

a reference book called 'The Wildlife of Antarctica', published in 1992: *this source is outdated – facts may be unreliable.*

a fact page on a website called 'welovepenguins.com': *there may be a possible bias with this site, based on the site name only.*

a fact page on a website for a wildlife charity: *the mission of a wildlife charity may influence their website content.*

an online article with the headline 'Top 10 AMAZING facts about penguins that you WON'T BELIEVE!': *this is clickbait, the article may exaggerate facts. It would be important to check supporting sources of an article like this.*

Exercise 4

a. This task is a more comprehensive opportunity for learners to apply what they learnt from the text in Exercise 3. Present learners with the reading text about penguins. Students work together to read the text in detail, and make notes on each of the criteria for reliability in the table.

Note: If you would prefer to introduce this text in a more typical format before learners jump into the detailed reading, here are some ideas:

Orientation/Lead-in question:

What factors (environmental or man-made) might affect penguin populations?

Gist questions:

Question 1: Why is the Antarctic penguin population at an all-time low?

Question 2: How sure are you about your answer to Question 1?

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TEACHER'S NOTES

Tip	Reliable (YES/NO)	Comments
Think about the source	NO	The website name, 'What Climate Change?' suggests a bias towards climate change denial
Keep reading ...	NO	There are various debatable pieces of information in the text. An imaginary research institution, erroneous dates, fake scientists and lack of supporting sources are examples. Perhaps the most inaccurate comes at the end, when the scientist is quoted as saying that polar bears are a threat to penguins. There are no polar bears in Antarctica ...
Check the author	NO	This is subtle, and learners may not recognise this hidden meaning without online searches. Amelie and Humboldt are two species of penguins. Similarly to the author's name, the scientist's name also has a hidden meaning. Scott and Amundsen were both polar explorers.
Supporting sources	NO	The writer states: 'Some sources have reported that ...', without referencing the sources.
Check the date	NO	No date is given
Is it a joke?	MAYBE	The mention of polar bears, and the subtle references to polar explorers, suggest that this may be a joke. However, the middle section of the article quotes a (fake) scientist denying that the decline in the penguin population (which is actually a half-truth) is down to climate change. This may be the main point that the author is trying to highlight, but this is up to the reader's interpretation.
Are you biased?	-	This depends on the students' own views. However, bias is not only down to the reader, it is down to the writer, too. Learners may cite various examples of writer bias in this text.
Ask the experts	-	If there is a penguin expert in the class, or someone with knowledge of environmental sciences, they can be your expert. If not, learners could search for more reliable information online. Or, 'the expert' can be these teacher's notes, as they're written by the person who made the article up ...

b. This exercise is optional. It is an additional way to consolidate the information provided on reliable sources. Instruct learners to annotate the reading text, noting around ten questions they would ask themselves as a reader of the text. This is a prompt for how they might apply the information they have learnt in everyday life, to think more critically about a text during the reading process.

Refer learners to examples on the handout for help.

c. This is a reflection stage. Students discuss the questions in pairs.



Exercise 5

Learners choose from a list of three follow-up tasks to consolidate what they've learnt.

Task 1: This task involves access to the internet, and also student access to their own social media accounts. If you are teaching this with teen classes, then you may wish to ensure that this task is in line with any safeguarding procedures at your school.

Task 2: This does not require digital technology. However, you could get learners to make an infographic on a site like [canva.com](https://www.canva.com) or [genially.com](https://www.genially.com)

Task 3: You can use the information from Exercise 3 as success criteria for this task. Learners can read each of the information boxes, and consider how they can make their own article *appear* real. Examples:

- We should make sure the article has a recent date of publication
- We should add supporting sources that sound real, because not everyone will click on them to check!

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WORKSHEET

EXERCISE 1

FAKE NEWS

A story that is presented as being a genuine item of news but is in fact not true and is intended to deceive people.

a. Work with a partner. Discuss these questions:

- Have you ever read fake news online? If so, how did you know it was fake?
- Why do you think people write fake news stories?
- What can people do to avoid fake news?

b. You would like to find some facts about penguins. Look at the list of information sources. Work with a partner. Rank the sources from 1–5 based on how much you would trust them (1 = most reliable, 5 = least reliable)

- a page about penguins on Wikipedia _____
- a reference book called 'The Wildlife of Antarctica', published in 1992 _____
- a fact page on a website called 'welovepenguins.com' _____
- a fact page on a website for a wildlife charity _____
- an online article with the headline 'Top 10 AMAZING facts about penguins that you WON'T BELIEVE!' _____

Explain your answers to another pair. Justify your opinions.

EXERCISE 2

a. Work with a partner. Look at the words/phrases in the box.

- Explain the words/phrases you already know.
- If you don't know the meaning of a phrase, see if your partner can help you.
- If you are still unsure about any words/phrases, use a dictionary or ask your teacher.

source fact biased grab someone's attention headline
be familiar with something confirm something claim if in doubt

b. Match the words or phrases from the box with their correct definition. You may need to change the form of the word or phrase.

1. We could put a nice display in the shop window. That might _____ the customer's _____.
2. I'm not sure I trust this information. Is it from a primary _____?
3. I really think the referee is _____. I mean, he's given us two red cards and given the other team three penalties! That's hardly fair, is it?

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4. This medication may not be suitable for people with existing illnesses.
_____, consult your doctor before using this product.
5. It's a scientific _____ that the Earth orbits the sun, although people haven't always believed this.
6. Sorry, I'm a Windows user. I'm not _____ Macs. Could you help me load some files?
7. They _____ the appointment of the new Prime Minister late last night.
8. The suspect _____ that he was at home when the crime took place.
9. I don't really watch the news. I listen to the _____ now and then, but I find most of the news these days depressing.

EXERCISE 3

a. Identifying fake news isn't easy! The table below lists various tips to help you decide whether an online information source can be trusted. Match the tip title to its description.

- Think about the source
- Are you biased?
- Ask the experts
- Keep reading ...
- Is it a joke?
- Check the author
- Check the date
- Supporting sources

1.	Do you know the source? Have you used this source in the past? What is the mission or purpose of the website (e.g. to entertain, inform, promote, sell, etc)? Where was this source shared? Do you trust information that is shared on social media?
2.	Sometimes articles begin with a headline that grabs the reader's attention. Read on, because the headline may not tell the whole story.
3.	Who wrote the article? Are you familiar with the writer? Are they even a real person?
4.	If a story includes sources for its facts, click on the sources. Check the details – do the sources actually say what the story claims?
5.	When was the article published? Is it up-to-date, or is it old news? Be careful – some sites will repost old stories but change the date to make them seem more recent.
6.	Is the article actually serious? There are many sites which share fake stories that are meant to be funny.
7.	What's your opinion on the topic? People often trust information that confirms their own beliefs. We are also more likely to trust information shared by people (e.g. friends) that have similar beliefs to our own. A story might share ideas that support your own views, but that doesn't mean they are true.
8.	If in doubt, ask an expert. There are online fact checking sites that can help you decide if information is real or fake.

b. Look back at the sources from Exercise 1b. Which of the tips from the table relate to each source?

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EXERCISE 4

a. Read the short article on penguins. Make notes about the article in the table.

Tip	Reliable (YES/NO)	Comments
Think about the source		
Keep reading ...		
Check the author		
Supporting sources		
Check the date		
Is it a joke?		
Are you biased?		
Ask the experts		

b. Work with a partner. Annotate the text with ten specific questions for the reader. The questions should help the reader notice that this text is fake.

Examples from paragraph 1:

'The population of penguins in Antarctica is at its lowest since records began in 1921.'

- Did records on penguin populations really begin in 1921?

'Some sources have reported an 80% decline in penguin numbers across the continent in the last 50 years.'

- Which sources?

c. Discuss the questions with a partner.

- Which fake features of the text did you find it easy/difficult to identify?
- Do you often check supporting sources, author details or website missions when you read an online article? Why / Why not?
- Is there anything you've learnt from this activity that you can apply in real life?

EXERCISE 5

Choose one of the tasks from the options below.

Task 1

Open an online article that you've read recently. Alternatively, open an online article that somebody has shared on your social media news feed. Analyse the article using the tips from this lesson. Share your findings with a partner.



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Task 2

Summarise the tips and information from this lesson as an infographic to share in the classroom.

Task 3

Can you write your own fake news?

Choose a topic from the list:

- a fake news story about a sports star, written by fans of an opposing team
- fake celebrity gossip, written to encourage internet users to visit a website
- a news story which adds evidence to the idea that climate change is not real
- a 'shock' article designed to get readers to change their habits or lifestyle
- your own ideas

Create a short fake news story (200 words) on this topic. Remember, try not to make it obvious that the article is fake news.

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Revealed: The REAL reason the penguin population of Antarctica is at an all-time low



Experts say tourism and predators have seriously affected numbers.

By Adelie Humboldt

The population of penguins in Antarctica is at its lowest since records began in 1921. Some sources have reported an 80% decline in penguin numbers across the continent in the last 50 years, and numbers are likely to fall even more.

Scientists from the *Institute of Penguin Research*, based on the northern tip of Antarctica, say that the decline in numbers is mainly due to increased tourism.



‘We’ve noticed a sharp increase in the amount of commercial boats travelling to and from Antarctica in recent years,’ said Scott Amundsen. These boats are polluting the penguin’s natural habitat, and disturbing their breeding patterns.

Scientists stressed that the decline in penguin numbers was not connected to climate change. Amundsen added, ‘We’ve been based on Antarctica for over two decades. We’ve seen no real changes to the ice here, it’s the same as it’s always been. The problem is not climate change, it’s tourism. Don’t let those so-called climate-change experts fool you.’

Amundsen also stated that a further reason for the fall in penguin numbers – an increase in the number of predators in the area. ‘The seal population has increased dramatically in recent years, which poses a real threat to penguins. But it’s the rise in polar bear numbers that is the real problem.’

