

# 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](http://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!