



Wikimedia in Schools Series

Fake News

Notes for Teachers:

Before completing this session we recommend looking at the [Introduction to Wikimedia](#) handout for context. This should take about 10 - 15 minutes and is designed to give students an understanding of Wikimedia and Wikimedia projects before beginning the Wikimedia in schools series.

The lessons in the series can be completed in any order, and each is a stand-alone lesson. However, completing the whole series will give students a deeper understanding of digital and media literacy, and how to use these skills to increase democratic and civic engagement and for positive social change.

All answers given in the teacher copies are suggestions, and other answers may be equally suitable.

If you have any questions about the delivery of this session please contact our Education Lead sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk.

You can also sign up to our [newsletter](#) here to see ideas and best practice from other schools.

The Wiki Teacher Community also has a [Facebook group](#) which you can join.

Remember to join our [mailing list](#) for updates on webinars and events.

Session Objectives:

- ★ Students should understand the difference between misinformation and disinformation.
- ★ Students should understand how social media can be used to spread fake news.
- ★ Students should understand the importance of spotting fake news, and the harms it can cause.
- ★ Students should understand the reasons why fake news spreads and why people might be drawn to believing it.
- ★ Students should understand the ways in which they can build resilience to fake news and do their own research.
- ★ Students should understand the way Wikipedia can be used to combat fake news.

Session length:

1.5 hours without online activity.

2 hours with online activity.

Activity 1: Opening Discussion



In pairs or small groups, discuss the following questions and make notes for feedback to the whole group:

1. Have you ever come across fake news? Come up with some examples in your group.
2. Did you know it was fake news at the time?
3. If you knew it was fake news, how did you know? If you didn't know it was fake news, how did you find out?
4. Do you think fake news is increasing or decreasing? Explain your answer.

Types of Fake News:

Key Terms:

Misinformation:

Fake news that is not created with the intention to cause harm. It is inaccurate and misleading, but has been shared with the belief that it is true.

Disinformation:

When fake news is shared deliberately, with the knowledge that it is fake, then it is disinformation. This is often done with the intent of making people feel a certain way about a person, group of people or theory, and can incite hatred and harm.

[Stop Hate UK](#) identify the following ways in which disinformation can occur:¹

- It makes a false connection between an individual or group, and a social issue.
- It manipulates pre-existing content to support a false story e.g. using a picture from one event and claiming it is from another, unrelated, event.
- 'Imposter content' when another site may try to impersonate a reliable source.
- When information is falsified or fabricated about a person or group.
- When a pre-existing story is framed in a misleading way to place blame on a certain person or group.
- When content is focussed solely on 'negative' content about groups or individuals, without any acknowledgment of 'positive stories', in order to create a distorted perspective that 'demonises' the group targeted.

¹ <https://www.stophateuk.org/about-hate-crime/what-is-online-hate-crime/misinformation-and-fake-news/>

Activity 2: Why do people believe fake news?



Here is an example of a fake news story that was widely shared on social media:



Fact check... this was a group celebrating Pakistan winning the 2009 ICC Cricket World Cup.

Why do you think so many people believed this fake news? What emotions are involved?

Students may talk about fear, hostility, anger, uncertainty.

² Example from Stop Hate UK <https://www.stophateuk.org/about-hate-crime/what-is-online-hate-crime/misinformation-and-fake-news/>

Out of Context:

It's easy to create misleading headlines. Take the following:



TAYLOR SWIFT REACTS TO KNOCKING RIVAL OLIVIA DEAN OFF THE UK
NUMBER ONE SPOT.

Fact check...

In fact, Taylor Swift did replace Olivia Dean at the top of the UK charts in October 2025. She probably also gave a reaction of some sort. But this is a totally unrelated image. With the addition of the word 'rival' in the headline, we have a misleading narrative that Taylor Swift doesn't like Olivia Dean and is delighted to knock her off the top spot.

This sort of disinformation is created to get clicks and likes, and often creates false impressions leading to divisions between people or groups. Fake news campaigns often try to increase existing divisions such as gender, race or class.

³ Marcin Wichary from San Francisco, U.S.A., CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Activity 2: Create your own misleading headline



Go to [Wikimedia Commons](#), which contains free-to-use images. Do an image search, perhaps for a famous person, an event or something from the natural world. Remember that you can copy and paste the author details, as you must give credit.

Take that image and create a totally false headline to go with it. Remember to play on emotions to make it something people want to click on!

You can do this below if you are using an online version of the booklet, or create a separate document.

If students need guidance, you could suggest ideas along the following lines:

- *A picture of a celebrity looking upset, with a fake reason why.*
- *A picture of heavy snowfall from a different year, with the headline 'London braces for bad weather.'*
- *A picture of a teenager with the headline 'crime is on the rise in Manchester'*
- *A picture of a horse, with the headline 'New restaurant shocks with menu.'*

Activity 3: Social Media and Fake News



Although fake news has always existed, its reach and the speed at which it can now spread due to social media present a new challenge. Fake news can be spread by individuals or 'bad actors' or the design features of social media.

Read the following definitions and think about how it might contribute to fake news.

Definition	How might this contribute to the spread of fake news?
Sockpuppet: A fake online identity used to deceive. It may be used to praise a person or organisation to make it seem like they are more popular than they are.	<i>Fake news stories seem legitimate if more people are supporting them and providing positive comments, making others more likely to share.</i>
Astroturfer: A fake account that masks an organisation (such as political, religious or advertising) in order to make it seem like their support is 'grassroots'.	<i>If 'ordinary' people 'just like us' seem to be supporting a fake theory, it seems more organic and believable. People are more likely to trust it.</i>
Echochamber: When social media only shows you one kind of content, without showing you different perspectives.	<i>When we only hear news that supports our pre-existing ideas we don't hear challenges or other perspectives, making us likely to accept fake news.</i>
Disappearing content: Content that is posted automatically disappears after a short time.	<i>People see fake news and are influenced by it before they have time to check the sources.</i>

Why Should We Worry About Fake News?

Fake news is damaging for a number of reasons:

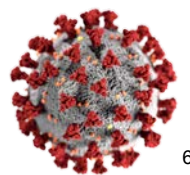
- It can damage individual wellbeing, and create unnecessary fear and anxiety.
- It can damage people's health when they follow incorrect advice.
- It can lead to divisions and even hate between individuals or groups.
- It can damage the democratic process, meaning that people are voting based on incorrect information.

Fake news often increases around times of war or crisis. For example, an Ofcom report in March 2020 found that 46% of Britons had encountered misleading information about the pandemic.⁴

Fake news also affects different groups disproportionately. For example, Ofcom also found that 16-24 year-olds were the most likely to encounter fake news during the pandemic.

Dr Julia Slupska, Head of Policy, Research and Campaigns at Glitch, which campaigns against online abuse, pointed out that minority ethnic groups, particularly Black women, are 34% more likely to be the target of online disinformation.⁵

The result is that fake news can worsen inequalities, especially in healthcare.



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https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand-research/covid-19-news-and-information-consumption-attitudes-and-behaviour/week-one/covid-19-news-consumption-week-one-findings.pdf?v=324742&utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵ Glitch. 2023 Glitch x EE Hope United: Online Safety Bill Campaign. Medium. 13 April 2023. See https://medium.com/@glitchuk_/glitch-x-ee-hope-united-online-safety-bill-campaign-fa047430f508 (accessed 12 June 2024)

⁶ Alissa Eckert, MS; Dan Higgins, MAM, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

How Can We Build Resilience Against Fake News?

We will all be exposed to fake news at some point, so we have to make sure we know how to guard against it.

The New York Times claims that an inability to judge information can lead to people believing everything that aligns with their preconceived beliefs, or a mistrust of everything.⁷

The best way to combat fake news is by developing **information literacy**.

The Chartered Institute for Librarians and Information Professionals in the UK (CILIP) defines information literacy as follows:

Information literacy allows individuals to acquire and develop their understanding of the world around them; to reach informed views; where appropriate, to challenge, credibly and in an informed way assumptions or orthodoxies (including one's own), and even authority; to recognise bias and misinformation; and thereby to be engaged citizens, able to play a full part in democratic life and society.

Information literacy helps to address social exclusion, by providing disadvantaged or marginalised groups with the means of making sense of the world around them and participating in society.











⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/20/education/learning/news-literacy-2016-election.html>

⁸ Nick Youngson CC BY-SA 3.0 Alpha Stock Images, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions ([IFLA](#)) suggests eight steps students can take to evaluate information and strengthen their critical thinking.⁹

HOW TO SPOT DISINFORMATION

 <p>Consider the source Who is publishing this information?</p>	 <p>Check the author Who wrote this?</p>	 <p>Check the date Are these stories still relevant?</p>	 <p>Check your biases How are your own beliefs affecting your judgement?</p>
 <p>Read beyond Is the headline actually telling the whole story?</p>	 <p>Supporting sources Can you verify the sources?</p>	<p>JOKE</p>  <p>Check the intention Is it a joke?</p>	 <p>Ask the experts Can you consult a teacher librarian, or fact-checking sites?</p>

It is also important to ask yourself how the content is trying to make you **feel**.

Is it trying to make you feel angry or afraid?

Is it making you feel hostile towards an individual or group?

⁹ Image taken from [Reading Wikimedia in the Classroom, Module 2](#).

How Can Wikipedia Help Fight Fake News?



WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

There have been times when Wikipedia has been seen as unreliable, but in fact it is a tool to fact-check the news you come across online. There are several reasons for this.

Wikipedia's Core Policies:

- Neutral Point of View... this means that there are no opinions or bias, and when there are debates both sides will be presented.
- Verifiability... this means that the information in articles has to be supported by reliable sources that can be checked.
- No original research... this means that only research that has already been accepted through peer review will be included.

Real-Time Reviews and Safeguards:

- Live feed of edits, with complete transparency on the 'history' and 'talk' pages.
- Vandalism is reverted within minutes. It is a common misconception that anyone can post anything on Wikipedia and it cannot be reverted.
- Some articles are 'protected' if there have been repeated attempts to vandalise them, so that only experienced editors can make changes.
- Machine learning is used to check for offensive slurs.

During the [Southport riots](#) in 2024, following the stabbing of children at a Taylor Swift themed dance workshop, Wikipedia editors worked around the clock to remove fake news from Wikipedia.

Wikimedia (the charity that supports Wikipedia and other projects) also repeatedly refused requests from the Russian Government to take down articles relating to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

So, if you are checking whether information is fake or real, Wikipedia is a good place to start.

Ideas for Follow-Up Activities:



- Produce a poster illustrating all the ways you can check the reliability of the content and news you come across.
- Take the BBC Bitesize [Fake News of the Year 2025 Quiz](#)
- Sign up to the [Full Fact](#) mailing list for fact-checking information to combat fake news.

Evaluation and Feedback

We would be very grateful if you would fill in this [short teacher evaluation](#) about the session, so that we can improve the Wikimedia in Schools resources.

If you are happy to provide anecdotal feedback on how you found the session and resources this would also be gratefully received. Please contact Sally Latham at sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk.

Many thanks for taking part in this pilot!