

How to avoid falling for fake news?

Task 1: Sum up the main idea of each of the strategies.

Task 2: With regard to your thoughts in our last lesson, why you fell for fake news, which strategy /ies would be useful for you to avoid falling for fake news? **Evaluate.**

1 From claims that The Simpsons predicted Trump's presidency in the Year 2000 to the absurd story that the Queen has joked about assassinating Trump, our social media feeds are awash with lies and misunderstandings.

5 Just consider the 29 January shootings in a Quebec mosque, by Alexandre Bissonnette. In just a few hours, conspiracy theories had begun to percolate, claiming a police cover-up to protect a Muslim accomplice.

10 As David Mikkelson, the co-founder of myth-busting site Snopes, puts it: "The bilge is rising faster than you can pump." Tellingly, Snopes's own traffic almost doubled – to 13.6 million monthly visitors – in October last year, as readers struggled to make sense of the events leading up to the election.

Fortunately, psychologists are beginning to understand why we accept dubious claims that support our own viewpoint while neglecting facts that disagree with our views. In this round-up of our previous content, we explore six strategies you can adopt to avoid being fooled.

Don't be seduced by simplicity

15 A series of studies have shown that it is surprisingly easy to mask a lie in the veil of credibility, by making it sound so obvious it must be true. Often, this revolves around the "cognitive fluency" – whether the idea is easy to process. Simply printing a story in an easy-to-read font can do the trick. For the same reason, we are also more likely to trust someone if they feel familiar (if they have appeared on TV a lot,

20 for instance) – even if they clearly lack expertise in what they are saying. Try questioning your sources and look beyond the slick presentation.



Be smart to doctored images

25 Images can also increase a story's cognitive fluency, but thanks to software like *Photoshop*, they can now be easily doctored, and you may not realise just how easily this can manipulate your memory of history. The site *Slate* once ran an experiment, in which they showed pictures of certain political events – only some of which were real. When questioned afterwards, nearly half
30 their readers claimed to have remembered the fake events actually occurring. It's just one method of subtle suggestion that could lend credibility to a lie. So try to look for multiple sources of information, and don't just rely on the evidence immediately in front of your eyes.

Accept your ignorance

35 Many people suffer from over-confidence – the belief they know more than the average person. And our smartphones – with infinite knowledge at our finger-tips – can exacerbate this effect. As a result, we may feel less critical of the information that reinforces our assumptions, while dismissing anything that disagrees with us.

Look beyond your bubble

40 As Zaria Gorvett explains in her story on 'group polarisation', people naturally converge on the views of those around them – in both their physical and virtual neighbourhoods. So try talking to people with different views from your own, and look to news sources you wouldn't normally read. You might be surprised to find information that questions the facts you took for granted.

Be curious

45 Along similar lines, psychologist Tom Stafford suggests that we could all benefit from being more curious. Whereas education alone does little to prevent polarised thinking, people who are more curious appear to appraise scientific evidence in a more balanced way – so that they are not blinded by their existing ideology.

Consider the opposite

50 You may also benefit from the following strategy found in a vintage psychology paper. As Stafford describes in his piece, participants were asked to read articles about the death penalty, with the following instructions: “Ask yourself at each step whether you would have made the same high or low evaluations.”

So, for example, if presented with data suggesting the death penalty lowered murder rates, the participants were asked to analyse the study’s methodology and imagine the results pointed the 55 opposite way. As a result, they came to a more balanced opinion overall.

(Source: By David Robson, 11 February 2017; <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170210-how-to-avoid-falling-for-lies-and-fake-news?ocid=ww.social.link.email>; abridged; picture: <http://www.seniorweb.ch/knowledge-article/wie-erkenne-ich-fake-news>)

Annotations:

1 **claim:** a statement of something as a fact; 2 **to assassinate:** to kill in an illegal act; 2/3 **to be awash with:** to be full of; 4 **mosque:** a Muslim church; 5 **to percolate:** *here* to spread; 6 **accomplice:** a person who helps someone in committing a crime; 7 **bilge:** *here* rubbish, nonsense, *literally* dirty water; 8 **tellingly:** in a manner that tells a lot about someone or something; 11 **dubious:** of questionable character; 14 **to seduce:** to attract, to win over; 16 **veil:** *dt. Schleier*; 18 **to revolve:** to turn; **cognitive fluency:** *dt. logische Plausibilität*; 24 **slick:** *here* seemingly trustworthy; 31 **subtle:** so slight as to be difficult to see or understand; 32 **evidence:** a thing or set of things that you see, hear, etc. and that are helpful in forming a conclusion or judgement; 35 **to exacerbate:** to increase; 36 **to reinforce:** to strengthen, to encourage; 37 **to dismiss:** to stop considering, to refuse to accept; 38 **bubble:** *here* horizon; 39 **to converge:** to come together, to agree with; 42 **to take for granted:** to believe without checking; 46 **to appraise:** to make a considered judgement; 49 **vintage:** old, classic