



Helping Our Kids Tell Truth From Fiction

BY LEAH NIEMAN

We are in the information age, but not everything we read is truthful. Are we able to tell truth from fiction? Are our kids able to determine what news and information is real and what is fake?

A recent study from Stanford researchers considers this question. The study evaluated students' abilities to determine if information sources are real or fake.

Stanford researchers described the results as "dismaying," "bleak," and "[a] threat to democracy."

How did this happen?

We're getting a lot of our information online. Twitter, Facebook, and other sources online have become places we go for current news. We're following links to stories we see flow through our social media accounts to get news in realtime, but we're finding with the convenience of this "instant access" comes a whole new ballgame.

How can we determine if those sources are truthful or not?

1. Pay attention to the URL

When you go to any website, look at the URL. Most legitimate news sources are going to be a .com. If you see something like a .com.co, or anything that looks odd, that's a clue it may be a fake news site. You can certainly have .gov or .org. Those are going to be legitimate URLs. But if you start seeing additional .XX after the .com, .org, .gov, or anything that is not a normal URL ending, begin questioning the source.

Remember: Established news organizations usually use their own domain, and they're going to have a standard domain URL along with that.

Tip: If you find yourself on what you think is a legitimate news source but notice the URL has an odd ending, go check out just the regular .com. It's likely you'll find out you've landed on a fake news source.

2. There should be an "about us" section.

Most, if not all, credible sources of news information are going to have an About Us section. They want you to know who they are, who the people are writing the stories, and their credentials. All that information, for most websites and news sources, is totally transparent. If you go to a site and there's no About Us section or the About Us section is incredibly vague with no way to contact those running the site, then chances are it's not the most legitimate source of information you're going to find.

Remember: Legitimate sites have a clear About Us section. They are proud of their site, their writers, and their credentials.

3. Look for quotes within the story

When writing a story, quotes and sources should be cited and linked to the original source. If you don't see quotes in the story that are linking to those sources, that should be a little red flag that it's not a credible news source. The links should be to reputable sources. Links should not reference another site or person who's quoting that same quote. You're looking for the first source of information.

4. Check the comments

Many fake and misleading stories are shared on social media platforms using dramatic headlines. These sorts of headlines are used intentionally to inflame or mislead. People read the headline, are initially aggravated, and comment. This tactic draws many comments, and the comments cause greater visibility and circulation. Many people initially don't read the article, but once there are several comments, people begin to believe the story must be true.

Remember: Check that comment section and make sure that's not the case. A lot of the comments are going to come from Facebook, and Twitter, and social media, and other places because, again, they've used a headline that's meant just for social media and causes a lot of responses without people really going and understanding the story at all.

5. Use the reverse search image

Just like misleading story headlines, images can be used to generate traffic. Often the image circulating won't even represent the article. We often refer to these as "clickbait" because the image is used solely to get users to click so they land on a web page.

Remember: It's easy to "Google search" an image. If you see an image that looks unrealistic or just want to verify an image before clicking through, you can do a quick Google image search to find and verify the image. To do this, right click on the image. Select Google search for the image.

Being able to tell truth from fiction is a skill all kids need. It's a skill adults need as well. I'd encourage you to talk about real and fake news with your kids.

Begin a family project and keep track of how many times you can spot real news and fake news. Note the sources that are reliable, and begin to take note of where fake news pops up the most.



Leah lives in Central Illinois. She is a wife and mom of 2 homeschool graduates. She's a popular speaker who encourages parents to walk with their kids through the world of social media and technology to raise a generation of digitally responsible young adults. Article used with permission from leahnieman.com