

# Four ways to protect yourself from disinformation

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Image 1. With so much media available, it is becoming increasingly difficult to tell real news from fake news. Photo: Pixabay.

Most people believe something that is not true about news events at some point. You probably have, too. It is not your fault.

There are so many places to get news. It can be hard to know where to begin. Many people take in media without thinking twice about it.

You can have more control over your news. Here are four simple steps to becoming a smarter news reader.

## 1. Find News Outlets

You probably get much of your news from apps, sites and social media. Twitter, Facebook and Google are common ones. You should change that.

These are technology companies. They are not news companies. They want to keep you on their sites in order to get money from ads. They use your internet history to show you the news you will

like. It may not be the most important news of the day. The stories might lean toward the way you think. It may be outright lies or something that you have seen before. This keeps you there for as long as possible.

It is better to visit trusted news sites directly. These places share news to serve the public interest. You can see a more complete range of stories.

## **2. Use Basic Math**

News that can't be trusted often uses false numbers. Most readers won't take the time to fact check them.

Simple math can help you better spot lies.

There was a false story about illegal immigrants. Illegal immigrants are people from other countries who live in the U.S. without permission. The story said that over ten thousand Americans were "killed by illegal immigrants" in 2018. That is almost 2 out of every 3 murders in 2018.

Suppose you took the time to check the numbers. You would find that illegal immigrants made up a very small number of people in the U.S. So, it is not likely that so few people caused so many murders.

It just took a bit of looking and quick math. You can see these numbers don't add up.

## **3. Beware Of Biases**

News media are often called out for political biases. Bias is a lean toward or against an idea. News often favors the two major political parties: Democrats or Republicans.

There are other biases. One is toward the use of simple soundbites or quick headlines. These do not fully explain important problems. Studies found that false news stories often use simple and repetitive words.

Also, do not always believe what you see. Video is thought to be more trustworthy. Yet, videos can be changed. Seeing and hearing should not necessarily be believing. Question video just as much as other news.

## **4. Think Beyond The Presidency**

There is a final bias in the news to look out for. News groups often give the U.S. news more time. The presidency is an important story. However, this has taken away from the community and worldwide stories.

Voters understand issues across four levels. One is personal interests. This may include news about a city's sports team or health care costs. The three others are community news, the country's politics and world affairs. Knowing a little in each of these areas is important. Then, you can make connections to all the others.

Companies and other groups can heavily affect the news. They can create lies they want you to believe. Following these steps can put you back in control.

## Quiz

- 1 What can a reader learn by looking at the article's section titles?
- (A) how people can become smarter news readers
  - (B) what the main types of bias in news media are
  - (C) where false stories are most likely to be found
  - (D) who is responsible for creating false news stories
- 2 If readers are looking for information on problems with videos, which section should they read?
- (A) "1. Find Your Own News"
  - (B) "2. Use Basic Math"
  - (C) "3. Beware Of Biases"
  - (D) "4. Think Beyond The Presidency"
- 3 The author has an opinion about social media. Which sentence from the article shows this?
- (A) Twitter, Facebook and Google are common ones.
  - (B) They want to keep you on their sites in order to get money from ads.
  - (C) It is better to visit trusted news sites directly.
  - (D) You can see a more complete range of stories.
- 4 What does the author want the reader to learn?
- (A) False news stories can easily fool many people.
  - (B) People should get most of their news from apps.
  - (C) Soundbites can help people learn about the news.
  - (D) Community news stories are not important.