

Don't Get Fooled: 7 Simple Steps

Use the steps and questions below to avoid being manipulated, fooled or exploited by viral rumors, misleading memes, imposter news sites and fake images.

1. CHECK YOUR EMOTIONS: WHAT'S YOUR FIRST REACTION?

- **Are you angry? Outraged? Curious? Excited?**

Misinformation often tries to hijack our rational minds with emotional appeals.

2. DETERMINE THE PURPOSE OF WHAT YOU'RE READING, WATCHING OR HEARING:

- **Is it a news report? An opinion column? An ad? Satire?**

Knowing what it is helps you decide whether to trust it.

- **What do you know about the source (news outlet, blog, video producer, etc.)?**

Does it have an "About Us" (or similar) page? Does it provide biographical or contact information for its employees and contributors?

3. BE AWARE OF YOUR BIASES:

- **Are you assuming – or hoping – that it's true? Or that it's false?**

You're more likely to be less critical of information that "feels" right.

4. CONSIDER THE MESSAGE:

- **Is it "too perfect"?**
- **Is it overtly or aggressively partisan?**
- **Does it use loaded language, excessive punctuation – !!! – Or ALL CAPS for emphasis?**
- **Does it claim to contain a secret or tell you something that "the media" doesn't want you to know?**

5. SEARCH FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- **Are reputable news outlets reporting the same thing?**
- **Have independent fact-checkers contested or debunked it?**
- **Can you determine where it first appeared?**

6. GO DEEPER ON THE SOURCE:

- **Search for its name, then do a [WHOIS search](#) on its web domain. What do you find?**
- **Does it use social media responsibly? Do its posts and tweets appear reliable?**
- **Does it promptly correct errors in a transparent manner?**

Does the site include silly bylines or section headings?

Are there disclaimers anywhere on the site labeling it as satirical or fictional?

7. THEN GO DEEPER ON THE CONTENT ITSELF:

- **Search the byline: Is it a real person or a made-up name?**
- **Is what is being reported old or outdated information?**
- **Can you confirm key details (date, time, location)?**
- **Search any quotes used: Are they accurate? Are they presented in context?**
- **Do a reverse image search on photos and graphics: Do they appear elsewhere online?**

If so, are they shown in a different context? Have they been altered?

REMEMBER:

Visual misinformation is compelling.

People instinctively trust images more than words. Misinformation peddlers often try to use this against you.

Convincing fakes are easy to make.

Digital tools, such as Photoshop, and "create a fake" websites enable anyone to manipulate or falsify just about anything – social media posts, news reports, images and videos.

Bots and trolls are all over social media.

Not every account represents a person, and not all people express what they really think.

Information is the basis for decisions and actions.

Even if you're not fooled by a piece of misinformation, someone else whose decisions affect others may be. Help debunk examples of misinformation whenever you see them!