

Using Critical Lenses and Rules of Notice to Identify Fake News!

Rules of Notice (from DIVING DEEP INTO NONFICTION) for Fake News

Key Cues of Potential Bogusness

Calls to attention/Attention Grabbers, e.g.

- **The publication date is old and things have or may have changed since publication.**
- **The author is anonymous.** Practically all e-mails and many social media posts we see fall into this category, and anytime an author is unnamed or uses a pseudonym, the public should be skeptical. If the story were true, why would the author not put his or her real name on it?
- **The author is supposedly a famous person.** Of course, e-mails and social media posts that are attributed to legitimate people turn out to be false as well. Those popular messages about a Jay Leno essay and Andy Rooney's political views are both baloney. And we found that some oft-quoted words attributed to Abraham Lincoln were not his words at all.
- **The publication lacks other expected elements:** The post or text lacks a title, or other expected elements like sources cited, a URL, graphics and ads
- **The news source is partisan.** Beware Fox News and MSNBC alike – they both have agendas and the agenda is not unbiased exploration.
- **Inference leaps may not be justified by evidence and acceptable reasoning.**
- **There's math involved.** Check it. One message that falsely claimed more soldiers died during Bill Clinton's term than during George W. Bush's urged, "You do the Math!" We did. It's wrong.

DIRECT STATEMENTS AND DEMANDS, e.g.

- **The author uses absolutes and superlatives.** Issues are generally complex enough that credible news sources don't use absolutes or superlatives.
- **The message argues that it is NOT false.** This tip comes from Emery, who advises skepticism for any message that says, "This is NOT a hoax!" Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

RUPTURES/TWISTS

- **There's a reference to a legitimate source that completely contradicts the information in the post.** Some e-mails or posts will implore readers to check out the claims, even providing a link to a respected source. We're not sure why some people don't click on the link, but we implore you to do so. Go ahead, take the challenge. See if the information you find actually backs up the e-mail. We've examined three such emails in which the back-up material clearly debunks the e-mail itself. One message provided a link to the Tax Foundation, but anyone who followed it would have found an article saying the e-mail's figures were all wrong. Another boasted that Snopes.com had verified the e-mail, but Snopes actually said it was false. *Update, Nov. 19, 2014: Phishing*

attempts have become more sophisticated, so before you click on a hyperlink in the email make sure that it is in fact the correct URL and will bring you to the respected source you want.

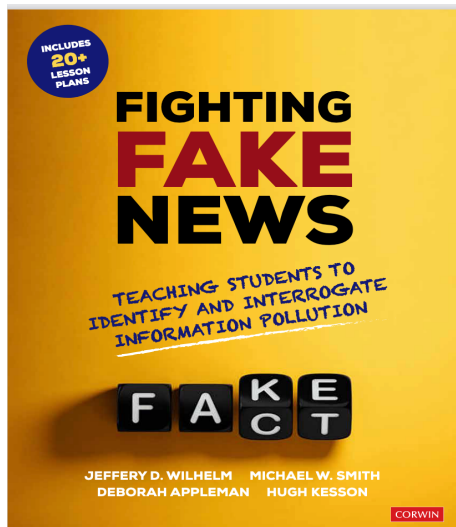
- **The message contains spelling or grammatical errors or obvious factual errors.** Ask yourself, why should you trust an author who is not only anonymous but partially illiterate?
- **Too many ads.**
- **Too many BOLDs or EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!!** If the author had a truthful point to make, he or she wouldn't need to put two, three, even five exclamation points after every other sentence. In fact, we're developing another theory here: The more exclamation points used in an e-mail, the less true it actually is. (Ditto for excessive use of capital letters.) This is OVERDRAMATIZATION BIAS
- **The language is loaded, overly emotional, extreme, or inflammatory.**

READER RESPONSE/THE VIBE

- You are **deeply triggered** or emotional in your response, or in your agreement or disagreement (confirmation and availability bias is at play)
- **The message violates your spidey sense.** In other words, the meaning just seems wrong, off-point, unjustified, improbable. You have not heard the info elsewhere, and you cannot corroborate it.

Adapted from John Spencer's 5 C's of Critical Consuming and "That Chain Email Your Friend Sent to You Is (Likely) Bogus. Seriously," by Lori Roberson, Factcheck.org, November 19, 2016, Retrieved from <http://www.factcheck.org/2008/03/that-chain-e-mail-your-friend-sent-to-you-is-likely-bogus-seriously/>

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OTHER RESOURCES:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/23/503129818/study-finds-students-have-dismaying-inability-to-tell-fake-news-from-real>

And a summary of the research from Stanford:

<https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Executive%20Summary%2011.21.16.pdf>

<http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/checkology>

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160105-the-man-who-studies-the-spread-of-ignorance>

<http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/sites/default/files/GO-TenQuestionsForFakeNewsFINAL.pdf>