

# EVERYDAY LIFE

## FAKE NEWS

**Age:** Teen/Adult

**Level:** Advanced (C1+)

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Activity:** In this lesson, students will:

1. share their attitudes and opinions on fake news;
2. learn vocabulary related to social media and fake news;
3. practise summarizing information in a text

**Language focus:** Vocabulary related to social media and fake news

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; one reading text per student.

## PROCEDURE

### Exercise 1

Students discuss the lead-in question with a partner. If they are unclear on the meaning of the term 'fake news', direct them to the info box, which contains a definition taken from the *Macmillan Dictionary*. Encourage them to make notes on their ideas, which will help them for the gist reading (Exercise 2a).

### Exercise 2

**a.** This is a gist reading task. Students skim read the text to see if it includes any of their ideas from Exercise 1a. Then they discuss the overall purpose of the text. You could extend this by asking who the audience of the text might be.

#### Key (possible answers):

1. The text is designed to inform and explain about how fake news spreads.
2. The audience for the text might be social media users. It might be found as part of a digital literacy course, as it highlights some online behaviour that leads to spreading fake news. Alternatively, it may be a general interest article.

**b.** This activity is a comprehension task. Remind learners to answer the questions according to the text.

#### Key:

1. What makes a bot effective at sharing fake news?

*Bots learn from interaction patterns, so they become more efficient. Also, they can share information on a large scale, and repetitively.*

2. How might users within our social network contribute to our confirmation bias?

*The text mentions how we share information that confirms our own beliefs. In turn, people who have the same beliefs as us will trust and share the information that we share. This reaffirms our own ideas, contributing to our bias.*

3. How might being trolled result in you sharing fake news?

*The text mentions that emotional responses are often done without thinking ('in the heat of the moment'), meaning we might not scrutinise/check the reliability of what we share.*

4. What is the real-world impact of microtargeting?

*The article mentions that microtargeting can be used during political campaigns. Data from social media can be used to target specific groups or potential voters.*

**c.** This is a summarising task. Students pick out the key information from each paragraph, summarising each paragraph in approximately 25 words. This could be done as a pairwork task. Once finished, students can compare with another pair to see if their summaries were similar. They can share feedback and discuss further possible edits with the other pair.

### Exercise 3

**a.** This is a vocabulary building activity. There are lots of challenging words in this text, and this task is a chance to guess the meaning of unknown words from context.

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**Key:**

Word/Phrase	Meaning
1. <b>bombard</b>	share so much of something that it is difficult to deal with
2. <b>validated</b>	officially proven to be true or correct
3. <b>confirmation bias</b>	the fact that we tend to believe something that supports our own views
4. <b>reaffirm</b>	confirm
5. <b>discredit</b>	to make people think that something is not true
6. <b>algorithm</b>	a set of rules that a computer uses for solving problems or calculations
7. <b>dubious</b>	not sure about the truth or quality of something
8. <b>scrutiny</b>	careful examination of someone or something
9. <b>infiltrate</b>	to become a feature of something gradually, without anyone noticing
10. <b>disinformation</b>	false information intended to make people believe something that is not true
11. <b>echo chamber</b>	a situation in which people only listen to or read others with the same views, and so are not receptive to or aware of different views
12. <b>(be) prone to</b>	likely to do something, especially something bad
13. <b>manipulative</b>	making people do what you want by influencing them in a clever or dishonest way
14. <b>vulnerable</b>	easily damaged or affected by something negative or harmful

Tips for vocabulary building:

- Encourage learners to look around the words in context to notice any patterns. You may wish to draw attention to these, for example *bombard* often appears as *bombard ... with*, *vulnerable* with *to ...* etc.
- You could talk about common contexts which some words appear in, such as *infiltrate* (military contexts). This could be a springboard for a discussion about the writer's tone and choice of words.
- Students could do an online search for social media specific terms such as 'echo chamber' and 'confirmation bias' to see how they are used in other contexts and establish whether they have generally positive/negative connotations.
- Although the task is mainly vocabulary building for receptive purposes, it is still worth focusing on pronunciation. Word stress would be a worthwhile pronunciation focus, and words such as *vulnerable* include a silent letter.
- Draw attention to other forms of each word where necessary. Note: the noun form of *manipulate*, (*manipulator*) appears in the text, too.

**b.** This activity is a chance for learners to use some of the vocabulary from Exercise 3a. The prompts provide some scaffolding; this is advanced vocabulary and learners may struggle to completely generate their own questions. On the other hand, at advanced level, learners may require more of a cognitive challenge, so the prompts should give them enough support to think of a suitable question. Add or take away support as you see fit. Possible full question forms for more support would be the following:

**Key (possible answers):**

1. Why do you think some people still try to discredit the moon landings?
2. Do you think politicians are manipulative? Why / Why not?
3. Do you know how algorithms work?
4. Why are elderly people more vulnerable to illness?
5. Are you prone to making mistakes when ... (driving / speaking English / writing essays / etc)?



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## TEACHER'S NOTES

6. Have you ever read anything dubious online? If so, what?
7. Do you think you are in an echo chamber on social media?
8. Do you have confirmation bias sometimes?
9. Do you get bombarded with spam emails or do you have a good spam filter?
10. How could we stop the spread of disinformation?

**c. and d.** This is a further chance to analyse language in the text. Students try to work out the meaning of the phrases in context. They then try to create their own sentences using these phrases. This can be challenging. If learners struggle, they could search online for examples of how these sentences are used in context. The purpose of this task is again to raise awareness of the phrases for receptive purposes mainly.

1. **attributed to:** to believe that something is the result of a particular situation, event, or person's actions
2. **plays into the hands of:** to do something that one does not realize will hurt oneself and help someone else
3. **in the heat of the moment:** at a time when you are too angry or excited to think carefully

### Exercise 4

Students discuss the follow-up questions to share their own views on the text, and consolidate what they've learnt.