



iSkills: Undergraduate critical thinking with newspaper and social media sources

Helen Bond and Elizabeth McIntosh

Teams etiquette



- This session is being **recorded**
- Please **mute your microphone** – this helps reduce background noise
- To ask a question, **type it into the chat** or wait to **raise your hand** at dedicated questions and answer points

Who we are



Helen Bond

Information Skills

Coordinator

Elizabeth McIntosh

Library Assistant, Radcliffe

Science Library

Today's session & learning outcomes



- **2 hours** with a 10-minute break
- PowerPoint presentation, live demonstration and activities
- By the end of this session, you'll be able to:
 - Describe what critical thinking means in the context of news articles and social media sources
 - Identify different forms of bias in news and social media
 - Recognise misinformation and 'fake news'
 - Understand and apply the SIFT Method to evaluate claims in news and social media sources

Introduction: What is critical thinking?



- Critical thinking **isn't** just being negative or finding flaws
- It means:
 - **Analysing information** – breaking down complex ideas to understand the key points
 - **Evaluating evidence** – checking the credibility and relevance of information
 - **Justifying arguments** – using clear, structured logic to connect ideas and create your own reasoned conclusions

What is critical thinking in news and social media sources?

- **Evaluating the source** - is it a reputable news outlet, an expert, or an anonymous account?
- **Recognising bias and emotional manipulation** - does the language try to provoke fear, anger, outrage?
- **Understanding algorithms and echo chambers** - social media often shows content similar to what you have liked/shared, reinforcing beliefs



Icebreaker: Where Do You Get Most of Your News?

Previous answers

- LinkedIn
- BBC
- The Times
- The Telegraph
- The Independent
- CNN
- Associated Press
- News podcasts on Spotify
- Twitter
- Substack
- New York Times
- Reuters
- Today programme (BBC Radio 4)
- The Economist

Social media as a news source



75% of 16–24-year-olds use social media to access news (28% radio, 22% newspapers, 52% television)

Ofcom. *News Consumption in the UK 2025 Research*

Findings. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/online-research/adult-and-teen-news-consumption-survey/news-consumption-in-the-uk-2025-research-findings.pdf?v=400636>.

What happens when we don't think critically?

- Inaccurate information **travels quickly**
- Easy targets for **propaganda** and **manipulation**
- **Scepticism** towards legitimate news and experts

Part 1: Critically Evaluating Newspaper Sources

Bias in news reporting (1)



- **Who are the sources?** Are they government and think tank representatives, or 'ordinary' people on the ground? Is there diverse representation?
- **Who is funding the newspaper?** Target audience and topics covered might be impacted

Bias in news reporting (2)



- **Is there loaded language?** This can influence public perception by invoking strong feelings
- **Are visuals misleading?** Images are processed faster than text and people can form opinions before reading the story
- Credit: FAIR <https://fair.org/take-action-now/media-activism-kit/how-to-detect-bias-in-news-media/>

Anything I've missed?

Tips for evaluating credibility of news articles

- **Distinguish** news from opinion and commentary
- Assess the use of **evidence**
- Identify **emotive language**
- Check for **balance** and **multiple perspectives**
- Recognise **clickbait**
- Check the **date**
- Check **other sources**

SIFT method



Stop – take a moment to stop and reflect

Investigate – look up the author and source

Find better coverage – find other sources corroborating or disputing the story

Trace claims, quotes and media to their original context

Demonstration: applying the SIFT method

Native advertising

- A paid advertisement that appears in the same format and style as non-paid content
- Benefits for the advertiser:
 - May have greater relevance for the consumer
 - The consumer is more likely to engage with the paid ad if it's presented as non-paid content
- Disadvantages for the consumer:
 - Paid content may go unrecognized as it blends in with other non-paid content

How to spot native advertising


- Normally signposted by the text:
 - "Recommended by ..."
 - "Recommended for you"
 - "Suggested post"
 - "Sponsored"

Example of native advertising: LinkedIn

The image shows a LinkedIn post from the page of 'Routledge Books', which has 2,953 followers and is a promoted post. The post features a large image of the book cover for 'Understanding Research Methods: An Overview of the Essentials' by Michelle Newhart and Mildred L. Patten, 11th Edition. The cover is primarily yellow and orange with a blue background showing a brain. A white circular call-to-action is overlaid on the image, reading 'Request an inspection copy'. Below the image, the text says 'Request your FREE Inspection Copy today!' with a 'Learn more' button and the URL 'routledge.com'. The post has 29 reactions (likes, comments, reposts) and 1 comment and 1 repost.

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29 1 comment • 1 repost

Like Comment Repost Send

Example of native advertising: Amazon

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Activity: applying the SIFT test

- We'd like you to look at **Activity 1** on our **task sheet**
- Take **10 minutes** to work individually on applying the SIFT test to a news article
- We'll then have a **discussion** together



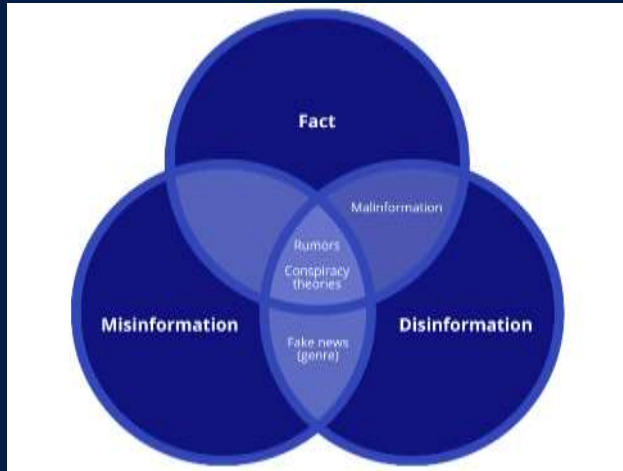
Discussion: Applying the Test to News Sources



10-minute break

Part 2: Critically Evaluating Social Media Sources

Misinformation v. Disinformation



Credit: Taylor & Frances

<https://insights.taylorandfrancis.com/social-justice/misinformation-vs-disinformation/>

- **Misinformation:** false information created and shared accidentally
- **Disinformation:** false information that is deliberately created and shared

Types of Disinformation?

- **Propaganda**
- **Satire and Parody**
- **Fake news**
- **Advertising**
- **Deep fakes**

Example: Fake News Spreads over Social Media (1)



UK Riots and the Online Safety Act of 2023



Read more: [How X fuelled UK riot misinformation | Fake News, AI & Conspiracy Theories | LSE Research - LSE](#)

Example: Fake News Spreads over Social Media (2)



- Misinformation spread quickly through posts on X
- Accounts with blue checkmarks used to have a rigorous verification process, but Elon Musk made them available through subscription
- Accounts used Generative AI to create and spread racist imagery with viral potential

Read more:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zshjs82>

What are social media Algorithms?



- Social media algorithms refer to a variety of processes that rank user-provided signals to **determine what type of content** and advertisements to display to users
- Information collected from users:
 - Posting Behaviour
 - User preferences
 - Connections

Source: <https://library.queens.edu/misinformation-on-social-media/algorithms>

Algorithms: Terms to know

- **Mass personalization:** psychological targeting powered by AI which uses gathered information to appeal to users and infer users' moods to tailor content.
- **Filter bubbles:** content selected by algorithms according to ranked user-provided signals
- **Echo chambers:** information environments where users are only exposed to information from like-minded sources

Remember: Social media algorithms are designed to keep your attention!

Source: <https://library.queens.edu/misinformation-on-social-media/algorithms>

How does bias impact critical thinking?

Bias of Perception

- **Confirmation Bias and Popularity**: seeing information repeatedly can **reinforce** one's beliefs about a topic and cause them to **disregard** information that does not support their belief.

Bias in Creation

- Is the source pushing one angle? Balanced reporting shows multiple angles and perspectives

Evaluating credibility of social media sources



- **What sources** are being cited?
- Is this an **advertisement**?
- **How** was the post created?
- What **techniques** are used to catch my attention?
- What does the creator **want to communicate** to viewers/readers?
- What are their **credentials**?

Demonstration: applying the SIFT method

Activity: applying the SIFT test



- We'd like you to look at **Activity 2** on our **task sheet**
- Take **10 minutes** to work individually on applying the SIFT test to a social media post
- We'll then have a **discussion** together

A note on AI

- Content looks confident, fluent and persuasive
- Errors may be hard to spot
- Social media is optimised for engagement and new and shareable content
- SIFT still applies:
 - Stop: What is being claimed and what is the evidence?
 - Investigate the source
 - Find further evidence, ideally outside social media
 - Trace claims

Wrap-up: next steps



- **iSkills: Scholarly literature for your research** expands on creating effective search queries and searching for scholarly materials
- Find more details – including slides, handouts, and a live recording – at <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ask/workshops/searching-and-finding-scholarly-materials-training-handouts#collapse3106306>
- Search through all available iSkills workshops:
<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ask/workshops>

Wrap-up: learning outcomes



- **As this session is at its end, you should now be able to:**
 - Describe what critical thinking means in the context of news articles and social media sources
 - Identify different forms of bias in news and social media
 - Recognise misinformation and 'fake news'
 - Understand and apply the SIFT Method to evaluate claims in news and social media sources
- Any **final questions?**



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Thank you

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