Fact-Checking 101

Susan Van Cleave

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What's the source? Is it credible?

- Does the article have a bias? Loaded words? Logical fallacies? Propaganda techniques? Booby-traps?

- Is it a straight news story, commentary, opinion piece, or satire?

- Do other credible news sources corroborate the story or facts?

- What's the counter-argument?

Possible Logical Fallacies, Booby-Traps, and Propaganda Techniques

Ad Hominem or Genetic – rejecting an argument based who favors it or on other arguments they espouse.

Red Herring – shifting the topic of disagreement to a something tangential to the original argument.

Straw Man – presenting an extreme position to argue against it.

Post Hoc or False Cause – assigning causation based on the sequence of events with insufficient or unrepresentative evidence.

Questionable Use of Statistics – accepting facts based on too little evidence, too small a sample size, or unrepresentative sample.

Suppressed Evidence – failing to mention or acknowledge important, relevant information when presenting your argument.

Bandwagon – encouraging people to think or act in some way simply because other people are doing so.

Vague & Undefined Terms – promoting or challenging an opinion by using words that are so vague or so poorly defined as to be almost meaningless.

Loaded Words – using words that are charged with strong positive or negative emotions.

Begging the Question – repeating a claim over and over without providing facts to support it.

Unreliable Testimonial – having an unqualified person endorse a product, action, or opinion.

Slippery Slope – arguing that one change will inevitably lead to another.

Undistributed Middle – You know A is a C and B is a C. It's a fallacy to then assume that A is a B.

Equivocation – using a term or expression to mean one thing and then to change the meaning later in your argument.

Confirmation Bias

Great resources can be found online to teach about bias, such as: FacingHistory.org/resource-library/facing-ferguson-news-literacy-digital-age/confirmation-and-other-biases

Fact-Checking Sites

AllSides.com – curates stories from right-, left-, and center-leaning media so you can compare and assess how biases influence reporting.

FactCheck.org – nonpartisan, nonprofit project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Monitors factual accuracy of politicians, ads, debates, interviews, and news releases.

FlackCheck.org – the political literacy companion site to FactCheck.org. The site provides resources designed to help viewers recognize flaws in arguments in general and political ads in particular.

Hoax-Slayer.net – provides information related to internet hoaxes, scams, and spam.

MediaMatters.org – not-for-profit progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media.

NewsBusters.org – a project of the conservative Media Research Center focused on "documenting, exposing and neutralizing liberal media bias."

OpenSecrets.org – nonpartisan, independent and nonprofit, the Center for Responsive Politics is the nation's premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy.

PolitiFact.com – Pulitzer Prize winning website rates the accuracy of claims by elected officials. Run by editors and reporters from the independent newspaper Tampa Bay Times, it features the Truth-O-Meter that rates statements as "True," "Mostly True," "Half True," "False," and "Pants on Fire."

ProPublica.org – independent, nonprofit newsroom, which has won several Pulitzer Prizes, has a mission to expose abuses of power and betrayals of the public trust by government, business, and other institutions through investigative journalism in the public interest.

Snopes.com – independent, nonpartisan website run by professional researcher and writer David Mikkelson researches urban legends and other rumors. It is often the first to set the facts straight on wild fake news claims.

SunlightFoundation.com – a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that uses the tools of civic tech, open data, policy analysis and journalism to make our government and politics more accountable and transparent to all.

TruthOrFiction.com – a non-partisan website where Internet users can quickly and easily get information about eRumors, warnings, offers, requests for help, myths, hoaxes, virus warnings, and humorous or inspirational stories that are circulated by email.

Washington Post Fact Checker – column written by Glen Kessler to "truth squad" the statements of national, international or local political figures. It assigns zero to 4 Pinocchio's to political claims. www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/?utm_term=.3c5d888a62f5