



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** via Microsoft Teams with a 10-minute break
- **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?

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

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



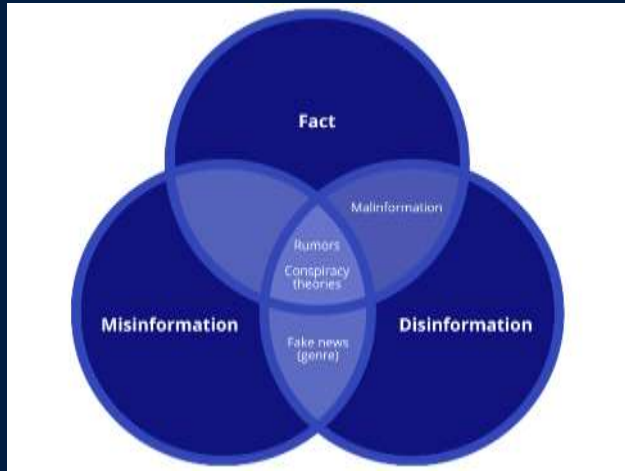
Discussion: Applying the Test to News Sources



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



The 'Pizzagate' Conspiracy Theory



David Goldberg
@DavidGoldbergNY

 Follow

Rumors stirring in the NYPD that Huma's emails point to a pedophila ring and @HillaryClinton is at the center. #GoHillary #PodestaEmails23



Carmen Katz

My NYPD source said its much more vile and serious than classified material on Weiner's device. The email DETAIL the trips made by Weiner, Bill and Hillary on their pedophile billionaire friend's plane, the Lolita Express. Yup, Hillary has a well documented predilection for underage girls, and Mr. Weiner just could not bear to see those details deleted. We're talking an international child enslavement and sex ring. Not even Hillary's most ardent supporters and defenders will be able to excuse THIS!

Like · Reply ·  6 · 3 hrs

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 you from taking a break to think.

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

How does bias impact critical thinking?

- **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.

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

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?**



Thank you

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