



# LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



## How to Identify Satire and Fake News

LEAP Online

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
What is Satire? .....	2
How is satire different from fake news? .....	2
Attempts to discredit a typically credible source .....	2
Hyperbolic statements for or against a person or institution .....	2
Conspiracy or paranormal theories.....	3
Racist, misogynistic, homophobic, or xenophobic messages .....	3
Fake News .....	4
What if we fail to recognise satire or fake news? .....	4
7 Questions to Ask When identifying Satire .....	7
What is the tone?.....	7
Does it point out hypocrisy?.....	7
Is it exaggerated or audacious?.....	7
What are the contextual clues? .....	8
Is it attempting humour? .....	8
Does it do something unexpected?.....	8
Does it use irony? .....	9
Summary .....	10
References.....	11

## Introduction



Suzanne is passionate about politics. She spends a good portion of her day engaging in lively (and respectful) debates on social media. When she sees a good meme or video that she thinks captures the mood, she quickly reposts it on her social channels.

Sceptical of traditional media, Suzanne prefers to get information from alternative outlets and non-traditional pundits who reflect her worldview. So, when she sees an outrageous story about a local politician who regularly draws her attention, she quickly reshares it on social media, along with a comment chastising the politician.

Soon, Suzanne's post receives a flood of responses. But not the kind she was hoping for. After browsing her mentions, Suzanne is mortified to learn she's reshared a satirical news story and has become a target of ridicule.

Unfortunately, she isn't the first person to get duped. When reading information online, the ability to recognise satire is a fundamental skill.

In this tutorial, you'll learn what satire is and how it differs from "fake news." Then, you'll get tips for spotting satire and avoiding the embarrassment of resharing fictional stories as fact.

## What is Satire?



Satire is a form of social commentary that uses sarcasm, humour, exaggeration, irony, and absurdity to illuminate larger societal truths and criticise prominent figures and institutions. Satire appears in many genres and mediums, such as the ones below:

- Newspapers, magazines, journals, and other publications
- Movies, television, theatre, and video games
- Fiction, poetry, drama, cartoons, and artwork
- Websites, social media pages, podcasts, and video platforms

### How is satire different from fake news?

Satire and fake news have one thing in common: They are both fictional or untrue. But despite similarities, they are not interchangeable. The key distinctions lie in their intention and impact.

Attempts to discredit a typically credible source

*“Independent Researcher Calls Pandemic a ‘Hoax Perpetrated by the CDC’”*

Hyperbolic statements for or against a person or institution

*“Local MP Plans to Make Veganism Mandatory in Public School canteens”*

Conspiracy or paranormal theories

*“Former Intelligence Analyst Says CDC Planned the COVID-19 Pandemic for Decades”*

Racist, misogynistic, homophobic, or xenophobic messages

*“Straight White Males Fall Victim to Systematic Ostracising”*



**Errors or inaccuracies do not automatically indicate fake news.** A news report may inadvertently include a factual error without intending to deceive the audience.

“People fall for fake news because they fail to think, not because they think in a motivated or identity-protective way.”

Gordon Pennycook and David G. Rand

## Fake News



### What if we fail to recognise satire or fake news?

Failing to identify a story as satire or fake news is a sign that you have not appraised the information correctly and used unreliable, untrustworthy source material in your assignment.

Furthermore, as Suzanne learned, it may cause embarrassment if you unwittingly reshare it on social media as fact. Under certain circumstances, the consequences are far more serious. The list below shows what can happen when we don't recognise satire or fake news.

- **Believing lies.** Without the right critical lens, you're susceptible to believing falsehoods
- **Spreading misinformation.** Resharing an untrue story as fact propagates lies and untruths
- **Tarnishing reputations.** When you spread misinformation about a person or organisation, you can damage their reputation
- **Sowing discord.** The proliferation of fake news creates a climate of mistrust and makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from lies
- **Inspiring hate and violence.** Fake news stories can prompt people to commit violent, destructive, and otherwise dangerous acts

## How to Identify Satire and Fake News

Arguably, one of the most difficult types of source material to use is acquired off the internet, such as a webpage. The internet is accessible to anyone with a connection, and much of its content can be edited. Therefore, it's crucial not to accept everything at face value – always scrutinise a little deeper and question its validity.

There exist numerous online platforms dedicated to satirical news, intended to be humorous or ironic while shedding light on what are perceived as ignorant or absurd viewpoints, particularly relating to political issues. While most of these websites and stories are easily recognisable, it's surprising how many individuals, just like Suzanne, can be misled. Some well-known examples of websites include:



### thedailymash

Websites, such as this one, will state that they are satirical, but it may not be explicit or hard to find. For instance, 'the daily mash' state their content and information is 'not accurate':

'We try to make sure that the content and information on the Daily Mash is not accurate. But things do change, so you might catch us out occasionally. If you spot any errors, please let us know.' (The Daily Mash, 2024).

Other websites also appear like other news outlets, can you see the resemblance?



### BBC News



### News Thump

When searching for 'NewsThump', they state their news is 'spoof and satire'.

## How to Identify Satire and Fake News

Perhaps the most contentious and infamous platform is 'Wikipedia.' While nearly everyone turns to Wikipedia at some point, it's essential to recognise its limitations.

Under no circumstances should Wikipedia serve as the sole source for your assignment or be directly referenced. At best, it can be used as a preliminary introduction to a subject and a means to access primary sources by following links provided.

The accessibility and popularity of Wikipedia stem from its open editing policy, which allows anyone to contribute or modify entries freely, and it's offered at no cost.

Wikipedia is not infallible, and unless you possess extensive knowledge on a topic to identify potential errors within a Wikipedia entry, students are advised to find original sources and rely on their capacity to assess and interpret information.

By Wikipedia's own admission:

'Because Wikipedia cannot be considered a reliable source, the use of Wikipedia is not accepted in many schools and universities in writing a formal paper, and some educational institutions have banned it as a primary source while others have limited its use to only a pointer to external sources.'  
(Wikipedia, 2024).

## 7 Questions to Ask When identifying Satire

### What is the tone?

Tone is the overall attitude or feel of a piece. It's critical to determining whether a story is real, satire, or fake. But it's not always easy to pin down. Satires range in tone from irreverent, disingenuous, or sarcastic to politically incorrect or borderline offensive.

However, satire often adopts a dry or neutral tone as a tactic for understating the silly or absurd. Research shows that fake news, on the other hand, tends to have an angrier, self-righteous, or aggrieved tone.

**Fake news:** *“Traitorous President Trades Government Secrets to Foreign Nation in Exchange for Support on Partisan Global Agenda”*

**Satire:** *“President Reassures Nation There’s ‘Nothing to Worry About’ From Deep Inside Fallout Bunker in Undisclosed Location”*

### Does it point out hypocrisy?

You can often identify satire by its social, cultural, or political concerns. Satire aims at powerful people and institutions, and its primary goal is to reveal hypocrisy and injustice.

Subject matter alone isn't sufficient to peg something as satire. However, satire unveils how powerful systems take advantage of the less powerful and exert influence unfairly or unjustly.

Example: *“MP Celebrates Immigration Bill With Weeklong Cancun Vacation”*

### Is it exaggerated or audacious?

Exaggeration means taking a real person or situation to its extreme to highlight its absurdity or ridiculousness. There are a few ways to accomplish this:

- **Caricature:** exaggerating someone or something's physical characteristics
- **Burlesque:** ridiculing or mocking a literary or dramatic work through exaggeration

## How to Identify Satire and Fake News

- **Overstating or understating:** increasing or decreasing the value or significance of something through description

Example: *Method Actor Spent 10 Years Waiting Tables to Prepare for Role as Struggling Actor*

### What are the contextual clues?

Context clues are key to identifying satire. Here are some fundamental questions to ask yourself:

- “Is the website or author known for satire?”
- “Is it biased, or does it have a political agenda?” “Is it a verified account?”
- “Does it cite sources?”
- “Does the website look professional?”

Many satirical websites will have a disclaimer stating that the content is satirical in nature. If you’re still unsure, research the source online. Cross-reference the information or claims made in the article to verify accuracy before taking action, and consider downloading browser extensions designed to flag fake news outlets.

### Is it attempting humour?

Satire relies on humour to make a point. Humour comes in many forms, which overlap with other elements on this list, like irony, witty or wry observations, exaggeration, absurdism, and understatement.

(Note that understatement is not overtly funny; its humour comes from downplaying a situation.)

### Does it do something unexpected?

With satire, you can expect the unexpected. This can mean many things. Here are five ways satire may catch you off guard:

- **Incongruity** is when you introduce something absurd or unexpected into an otherwise normal context.
- **Reversal** means switching the natural order of things. For example, imagine a cow dressed up as a farmer and the farmer grazing in a pasture.

## How to Identify Satire and Fake News

- **Anachronism** happens when you relocate a person or an object in a different time period. For instance, time-traveling movies often feature characters with outdated clothing or outdated references to comedic effect.
- **Malapropism** is the misuse or mispronunciation of a word to add humour to a situation, for example, “sedimentary lifestyle.”
- **Juxtaposition** is when you place two seemingly unrelated things together in a way that reveals a deeper truth about them.

### Does it use irony?

Irony is tricky to define. But generally, it’s when what’s said or done turns out to be the opposite of what was intended. There are four main types:

- **Verbal.** When the speaker says one thing but means the opposite.
  - Example: *“I just love it when I get called into work on my day off.”*
- **Dramatic.** When the audience knows something that a character doesn’t.
  - Example: The audience is aware that one character plans to double-cross another.
- **Situational.** When what’s expected to happen turns out to be the opposite.
  - Example: A fire station burns down.
- **Socratic.** When a character pretends to be ignorant to expose flaws in another person’s ideas.
  - Example: When a police officer asks a suspect a question they already know the answer to.

### Summary

Resharing a fake news story or a satirical piece as if it were true can make us look silly and cause others to lose respect for us. But when it comes to fake news, it can also spread lies and propaganda, leading to more serious consequences.

So, when evaluating a questionable source, ask yourself these questions:

- “What is its tone?”
- “Does it point out hypocrisy?”
- “Is it exaggerated or audacious?”
- “What are the contextual clues?”
- “Is it attempting humour?”
- “Does it use incongruity?”
- “Does it use irony?”

Remember that satire is a means of speaking truth to power, while fake news has the more sinister purpose of deceiving people into believing lies to push an agenda. When you learn to recognise the difference, you reduce the power of falsehoods to exert a negative influence on the world.



**When in doubt, throw it out.** If you're unsure whether a story is real, fake, or satirical, err on the side of caution and refrain from sharing it. At worst, you'll miss out on a good laugh with friends. But sharing false information only adds to the internet's most dangerous trends. Take solace in the fact that there will be more opportunities to share fun and entertaining stories online.

## References

Wikipedia. (2024) Reliability of Wikipedia. [Online] Available from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reliability\\_of\\_Wikipedia#:~:text=Because%20Wikipedia%20cannot%20be%20considered,a%20pointer%20to%20external%20sources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reliability_of_Wikipedia#:~:text=Because%20Wikipedia%20cannot%20be%20considered,a%20pointer%20to%20external%20sources).  
[Accessed May 2024].

The Daily Mash. (2024) Terms and Conditions. Available from:  
<https://www.thedailymash.co.uk/terms-and-conditions>. [Accessed 20 May 2024] .