

*This is a stable, but truncated version of the [same page by Melissa Zimdars](#).*

# False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical “News” Sources

## Tips for analyzing news sources:

- Avoid websites that end in “lo” ex: Newslo (Newslo is now found at Politicops.com). These sites take pieces of accurate information and then packaging that information with other false or misleading “facts” (sometimes for the purposes of satire or comedy).
- Watch out for common news websites that end in “.com.co” as they are often fake versions of real news sources (remember: this is also the domain for Colombia!)
- Watch out if known/reputable news sites are not also reporting on the story. Sometimes lack of coverage is the result of corporate media bias and other factors, but there should typically be more than one source reporting on a topic or event.
- Odd domain names generally equal odd and rarely truthful news.
- Lack of author attribution may, but not always, signify that the news story is suspect and requires verification.
- Some news organizations are also letting bloggers post under the banner of particular news brands; however, many of these posts do not go through the same editing process (ex: BuzzFeed Community Posts, Kinja blogs, Forbes blogs).
- Check the “About Us” tab on websites or look up the website on Snopes or Wikipedia for more information about the source.
- Bad web design and use of ALL CAPS can also be a sign that the source you’re looking at should be verified and/or read in conjunction with other sources.
- If the story makes you REALLY ANGRY it’s probably a good idea to keep reading about the topic via other sources to make sure the story you read wasn’t purposefully trying to make you angry (with potentially misleading or false information) in order to generate shares and ad revenue. Thanks to Ed Brayton for this tip!

- If the website you're reading encourages you to DOX individuals, it's unlikely to be a legitimate source of news.
- It's always best to read multiple sources of information to get a variety of viewpoints and media frames. Sources such as The Daily Kos, The Huffington Post, and Fox News vacillate between providing important, legitimate, problematic, and/or hyperbolic news coverage, requiring readers and viewers to verify and contextualize information with other sources.
- For more tips on analyzing the credibility and reliability of sources, [please check out School Library Journal](#) (they also provide an extensive list of media literacy resources) and the [Digital Resource Center](#).

# OpenSources Steps for Analyzing Websites:

## **Step 1:** *Title/Domain Analysis.*

If words like “wordpress” or “blogger” are in the domain that usually signifies it's a personal blog rather than a news source. If slight variations of well known websites appear, such as “.com.co,” this is usually a sign that the website is fake version of a source. However, remember that foreign reputable news organizations may have these country-specific domains.

## **Step 2:** *About Us Analysis.*

I usually google every title/domain name/anyone listed in the “About Us” section to see if anyone has previously reported on the website (snopes, hoax-slayer, politifact, factcheck.org, etc.) or whether it has a wikipedia page or something similar detailing its background. This is useful for identifying and correctly interpreting lesser known and/or new websites that may be on the up-and-up, such as satirical sources or websites that are explicit about their political orientation.

Then I look for information about the credentials and backgrounds of affiliated writers (is it a content mill or do they pay their writers?), editors, publishers, and domain owners (who.is etc.). It's also useful to see if the website has a “Legal” or “Disclaimer” section. Many satirical websites disclose this information in those sections.

A total lack of About Us, Contact US, or any other type of identifying information may mean that the website is not a legitimate source of information.

### **Step 3: *Source Analysis.***

Does the website mention/link to a study or source? Look up the source/study. Do you think it's being accurately reflected and reported? Are officials being cited? Can you confirm their quotes elsewhere? Some media literacy and critical scholars call this triangulation: Verify details, facts, quotes, etc. with multiple sources.

### **Step 4: *Writing Style Analysis.***

Does the website follow AP Style Guide or another style guide? Typically, lack of style guide may indicate an overall lack of editing or fact-checking process. Does it frequently use ALL CAPS in headlines and/or body text? Does the headline or body of the text use words like WOW!, SLAUGHTER!, DESTROY!? This stylistic practice and these types of hyperbolic word choices are often used to create emotional responses with readers that is avoided in more traditional styles of journalism.

### **Step 5: *Aesthetic Analysis.***

Like the style-guide, many fake and questionable news sites utilize very bad design. Usually this means screens are cluttered with text and heavy-handed photoshopping or born digital images.

### **Step 6: *Social Media Analysis.***

Look up the website on Facebook. Do the headlines and posts rely on sensational or provocative language-- aka clickbait-- in order to attract attention and encourage likes, clickthroughs, and shares? Do the headlines and social media descriptions match or accurately reflect the content of the linked article? (this step isn't particularly good at helping us find fake news, but it can help us identify other misleading news sources)

By considering all of these areas of information we can determine which category or categories a website may occupy, although all categorizations are by necessity open to discussion and revision.