

Reading and speaking

The post-truth age

- 1 Answer the questions.
 - 1 How do you get your news stories? How do you know they are accurate and reliable?
 - 2 What is *fake news*? Can you think of any recent examples?
 - 3 What do people mean when they say that we're living in a *post-truth* age?
- 2 Work with a partner. Use a dictionary to check the words in the box, and write them under the heading they are connected with, *Truth* or *Untruth*.

evidence (n)	fiction (n)	bias (n)
fabrication (n)	real (adj)	bogus (adj)
accurate (adj)	fake (adj)	doubtful (adj)
fact (n)	fantasist (n)	credible (adj)
exaggeration (n)	prejudice (n)	reliable (adj)
conspiracy theory (n)		

Truth	Untruth
evidence	fiction

- 3 Read the introduction and the first paragraph of the text. Who is Jeff Broadbent? What keeps him awake at night?
- 4 Read the full text and answer the questions. Discuss your answers with your partner.
 - 1 What's the problem with amateur journalism on the Internet?
 - 2 Why weren't old-fashioned conspiracy theories as big a problem as modern fake news?
 - 3 Why do we know that we can't completely trust mainstream news outlets?
 - 4 Why was fake news such a problem during the 2016 US election campaign?
 - 5 How can political leaders take advantage of fake news?
 - 6 Why are some people happy to believe that the facts they hear are unreliable?
 - 7 How can people make money from writing fake news stories?
 - 8 Why is the increase in fake news a danger to democracy?

FAKE NEWS



In 2017, 'fake news' was Collins Dictionary's Word of the Year. The previous year Oxford Dictionaries' chose 'post-truth' as theirs. **Jeff Broadbent** gives us the facts on the increasing unreliability of our news media (or at least we think he does).

As an investigative journalist, I spend my days checking facts and making sure I have evidence for the stories I'm writing. So it's not surprising that the idea of being in a post-truth age keeps me awake at night. It's a terrifying thought, that many people no longer care whether a news story is actually true, and are simply content to read something that *feels* true.

The good old days?

Now, I'm not pretending that everything in the media was 100% reliable in the past. We sometimes got things very wrong, and separating fact from fiction became more challenging as soon as the Internet provided every amateur journalist with an audience. So what's different now?

Well, in the past, we usually knew which articles had left reality behind – conspiracy theories telling us that men didn't really land on the moon, or that the British Royal Family ordered the murder of Princess Diana. This stuff was on fringe websites that looked like they were written by fantasists, and was read by a small minority. Most of us went to mainstream news outlets to find out what was really happening in the world, and although we know that newspapers and news stations have their own political bias, we felt safe in assuming that the basic facts were accurate.

