

NO to Disinformation!

How to Recognize Historical Manipulation
and Historical Fake News on the Internet



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1. Introduction

The inclination to gossip and believe rumours has been plaguing humanity since the dawn of time. **This facet of our psychology is connected both to natural curiosity and to the will to strengthen a person's social status by possessing some widely unknown, confidential and important 'information'** ①. These tendencies were also apparent in ancient history, playing their part in various intrigues and power games. Throughout the centuries, fake information has also been used during war, in order to confuse and mislead the enemy, cause panic among the ranks or even cause a new conflict, beneficial to the author of such 'fake news'. Sometimes documents were forged to lend credibility to the false information.

The effective range of false or manipulated information has grown with each improvement in publishing methods. The first breakthrough in Europe was the invention of the printing press. On the one hand, Johannes Gutenberg's creation made access to culture much easier but, on the other hand, it gave a dangerous weapon to those who wanted to spread chaos, sow hate or alter the course of history by disseminating lies. Similarly, the appearance of the modern press at the turn of the 19th century made the circulation of information significantly faster, which, of course, made spreading fake news much easier.

The development of the mass media (press, radio and television) became one of the hallmarks of the 20th century. It is no wonder that news manipulation and the spread of false information – which were termed 'disinformation' – developed at the same time. The word first appeared in Russian, and **disinformation activities became the trademark of the secret services from the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc states** ②, although they were conducted by intelligence services from other countries as well.

Soviet activity in this field was met with resistance from the West, especially the United States ③. One of the most famous disinformation operations was the joint Stasi-KGB action to spread the belief that the AIDS virus has been artificially created by Americans ④.

Caricature published in the newspaper *Pravda* in October 1986. According to the Russians, the virus was created in the Pentagon's laboratories, with the participation of Nazi scientists (that is why there are swastikas in the test tube marked in the speech bubble as the 'AIDS virus').

Source: *Pravda*, 31.10.1986, p.5.



After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, it seemed that the problem of disinformation would no longer be relevant. However, it soon turned out to be a false hope. The development of the internet and the appearance of social media made matters related to fake news and manipulation more important than ever. Today, every user of the World Wide Web is at risk of being manipulated. The goals are varied – affecting political decisions, smearing political opponents or other countries, manipulating consumer behaviour, destabilizing the situation or undermining trust in various institutions and organizations, among many others. Disinformation on the internet is spread not only by the special services, but also by specialist companies, and sometimes even by other more or less formalized groups, connected, for example, by common (usually radical) political views.

The efficiency of these actions is tied to the aforementioned **psychological mechanisms** ④. A significant role is also played by the immense speed at which information is spread, especially via social media, and the decline in methods for verifying information, which were typical for traditional media. On the internet, anyone can be a 'publisher' of information, regardless of qualifications. Sometimes it has its benefits – it allows important data to be exposed even if some people (for example, countries and companies) want to keep it hidden. However, this mechanism is often used to spread lies and manipulation. With the huge quantity of information we receive every day, it is easy not to notice the fact that we are victims of disinformation. Moreover, **algorithms responsible for suggesting content that appeals to us help create so called 'information (filter) bubbles'** ⑤. As a result, many users only interact with people of similar views, without verifying the content they see. Moreover, some of those groups start spreading disinformation themselves. Such activities become more dangerous as technology develops – today, it is possible to tailor the content of fake news to a particular person or create entirely fictional videos. Thanks to artificial intelligence, we can create **deepfakes – fictional recordings of real people** ⑥ that are extremely difficult to distinguish from real ones.



An example of a deepfake. Computer scientist Supasorn Suwajanakorn explains how he made use of AI and 3D modelling in creating fake videos, TED Talks, April 2018.

Supasorn Suwajanakorn, 'Fake videos of real people – and how to spot them' [screenshot: 4:47], April 2018 [accessed 17.2.2021]. Available at [TED.com](https://www.ted.com/talks/supasorn-suwajanakorn-fake-videos-of-real-people-and-how-to-spot-them)

Luckily, the internet also makes combating disinformation easier. Thanks to the ease of looking up information and the constantly expanding resources of digital libraries and databases, verifying information is faster and easier than ever. However, **rules created by journalists** ⑦, such as using two independent sources to confirm facts, and **the methodology of historical research** ⑧, mainly source criticism, are still relevant.

The aim of this manual is to present methods to help with the detection of disinformation relating to the past. Of course, they are fairly universal and worth applying in other cases too. Why did we decide to narrow this publication down? We aim to bring attention to the dangerous phenomena, usually glanced over in heated debates, about using disinformation in political quarrels and spreading anti-scientific views (for example, on vaccines and on the treatment of some diseases). Manipulation of the past and historical fake news are not only a problem for professional historians, but also for scientists and teachers. **We live in a time when not only debates about the past are on the rise, but when conflicts of memory are deepening** ⑨. Disinformation can serve not only to ignite them, but also to transform them into entirely real acts of violence and destabilize the current situation. Undermining the vision of the past of a group can serve to weaken its identity, which in turn causes it to wane or even disintegrate.

It is good to know how to distinguish historical disinformation from natural debates about the past and differences of opinion among researchers, and how to recognize historical fake news and not fall victim to manipulation, even if it uses real documents, photos and recordings. The basic methods are presented in Part 2; Parts 3 and 4 contain more advanced methods for the stalwart defenders of the truth.

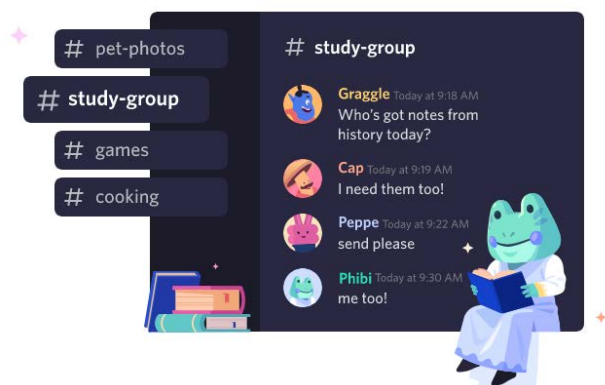
Read on!

2. How to recognize disinformation?

Answering this question is not easy, especially as **disputes and discussions about history are natural and beneficial** ⑦.

In the course of debate, historians refer to sources (often these documents are not widely known) and facts, propose their own interpretations and occasionally challenge currently accepted knowledge or beliefs. How then do we distinguish such debates (which have been appearing on the internet with increasing frequency) from deliberate disinformation? Below you will find useful advice. None of the suggestions can provide certainty – such methods do not exist – but using them will significantly help you not to fall for fake news or be manipulated.

Authors of disinformation use various tools, which are not always directly related to the flow of information. Even Discord, which is usually associated with gaming, has been used to conduct disinformation campaigns in recent years.



Discord – a free app designed to facilitate communication; in recent years it was also used to carry out disinformation campaigns.

Source: Main site of the **Discord** application: discord.com [accessed 17.2.2021]

Example of a fake **Facebook** account: the URL does not match the name and surname and a stock photo has been used.

Source: Vince Polston, 'How to Spot Fake Facebook Profile' [accessed 19.3.2021]. Available at malwarefox.com

2.1 Who is the author?

The first step should always be to determine the author of a message. Remember that it is not always the person you got it from – information is often passed on. In such a case, check the original author as well.

The basic rule is: do not trust anonymous information. If somebody is hiding their identity, they probably do not have good intentions.

In the case of social media, remember to check the account description and the URL – it should match the name and surname (or be a likely diminutive or nickname for that person). If it is a nonsense word or a random string of digits or letters, the account is most likely a bot or a troll farm employee. Check the profile picture (see below for details), as fake accounts often use stock pictures from a publicly available database. Check the previous posts of the account – if they are focused on passing on content (reposting, linking) and lack natural posts on a variety of subjects and interests (including a person's private life), it may indicate the account is fake. Similarly, watch out for a short account history and a small number of followers.

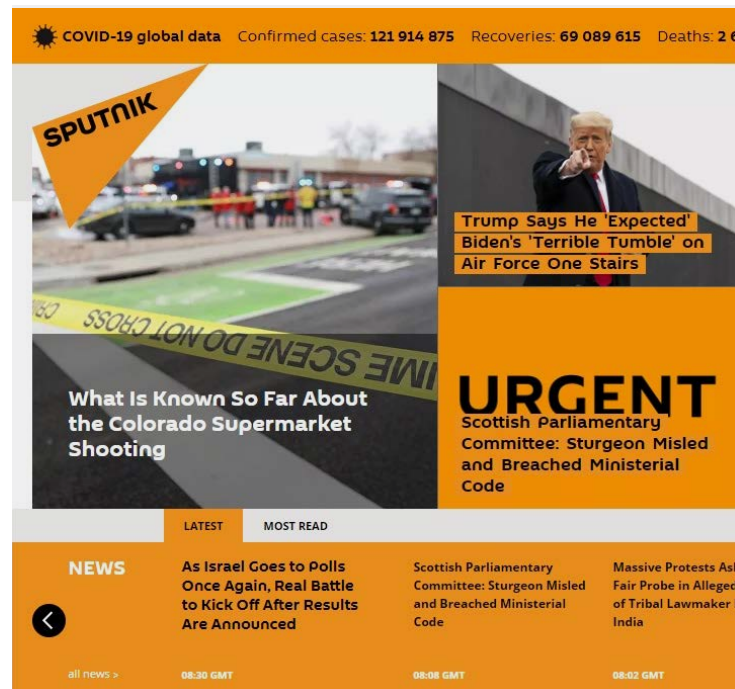
If the text is signed with a name, try to find out (by using a search engine) whether the person actually exists and is who



the article claims they are, for example, a historian, journalist or teacher. The same applies to people in videos – check who they are, consider if they are credible.

When you receive a link to some information, check the URL. Does it look trustworthy? Does it contain the name of a website about which you can find information – who is the owner, who is the editor? Again – make sure the actual website is not anonymous. Is it reputable? Check on fact-checking sites whether it has been known to publish false or manipulated information.

If the search results are not decisive, there is one more tool to try. **The Internet Archive** provides an actual tool for travelling back in time – **The Way Back Machine** (archive.org). It is a huge archive of millions of past versions of webpages, including copies of ones that no longer exist.



The Russian website **Sputnik** publishes content in over 30 languages. It is not anonymous, but that does not make it trustworthy. It is widely known to publish disinformation, including some that relates to history. A similar role is played by the worldwide television station **Russia Today**.

Source: Sputnik International main site: sputniknews.com [accessed 23.3.2021]

2.2 Take a look at the information

Some clues can be gathered by analysing the information itself. Disinformation is often formulated with an emotional and sensational tone, suggesting the discovery of an 'unknown truth' about a historical event or person.



Try using a search engine to look up fragments of the text. Bots and troll farm employees use prepared materials, copying them in multiple places, under different names and usernames. If you notice that the same text is repeated in various places, it is a warning sign. Try narrowing down the time frame and finding the original source. If you manage to locate it, verify it using the abovementioned rules on authorship.

One of the ways to cover one's tracks when spreading disinformation is to transfer it to a different medium. For example fake accounts and unaware users replicate a piece of news throughout social media, and then TV makes a story on it before it goes back to the internet in an

altered form (and based on a supposedly more trustworthy, traditional medium). In such situations, also try to find and verify the original message.

Check whether the text contains references to a source – a scientific publication, documents from an archive, a statistical yearbook, a past press article or the memories of a person. If so, it improves its credibility, however, it is always worth checking whether the source exists and whether its contents match what has been written (see Parts 3 and 4). Authors of disinformation know that sourced articles are trusted more and constantly improve their methods.

Remember that Google is not the only search engine. They all use different algorithms and their results can vary.

| | |
|------------|--------------------------------|
| Bing | www.bing.com |
| DuckDuckGo | www.duckduckgo.com |
| Yahoo | www.yahoo.com |
| Yandex | www.yandex.ru www.yandex.com |

2.3 Check the photo or video

Sometimes, disinformation contains photos or videos to ‘lend credibility’. They can be doctored (using software such as Photoshop) or be real but, for example, removed from the context of their creation or wrongly captioned 🚩.

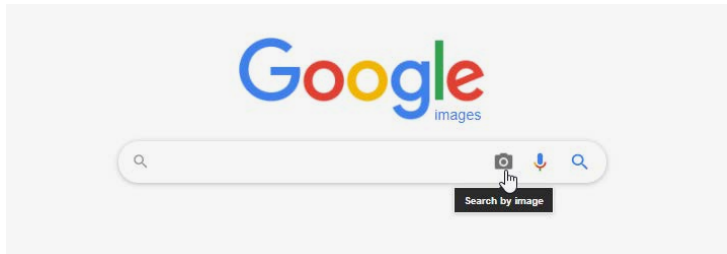
Detecting a doctored photo is often relatively easy. For example, this meme spread by Russian diplomats contained an edit. Notice the direction Hitler is looking in. Using this photomontage instead of an authentic photo from the Munich Conference is a manipulation tool. It suggests not only that France and Great Britain made a serious mistake (which is true), but also implies a close alliance made between Hitler and Mussolini in an atmosphere of friendship.

Source: **MFA Russia** @mfa_russia, The Soviet-German Treaty..., 17.9.2019 [accessed 14.10.2020]. Available at [Twitter](#).



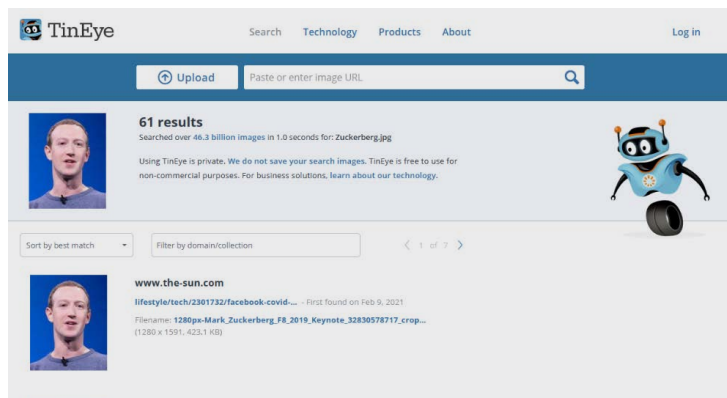
The easiest way to verify a photo is to use a reverse image search in Google Image or **TinEye** (tineye.com). In most cases, it will let you determine the origin of the photo. It may also enable you to detect manipulation such as cropping, and you can find out if it actually represents the described event. Pay particular attention to the resolution: usually the version with the most pixels is the original one.

In the case of videos, this is somewhat harder. However, you can try doing a reverse image search of the thumbnail. It can be extracted using a simple tool prepared by **Amnesty International** (citizenevidence.amnestyusa.org). Authors of disinformation sometimes copy all the material without any changes, making it possible to find the original.



The main site of **Google Images**, allowing a reverse image search.

The more advanced can use **methods of critiquing sources employed by historians** ②. Look at the photo and consider whether the depicted objects existed in the time described in the text. Do the uniforms belong to the unit? Does it really show the person mentioned in the caption? Do the buildings look as if they come from the place where the photo was supposedly taken? Such analysis can be made easier by comparing it with other photos related to the event, which can be found on the internet or in publications. These can be found both online and in the physical world (Parts 3 and 4).



An example of a Mark Zuckerberg image search. **TinEye.com** searched over 46.3 billion images in one second, providing the user with a list of websites that included the searched image.

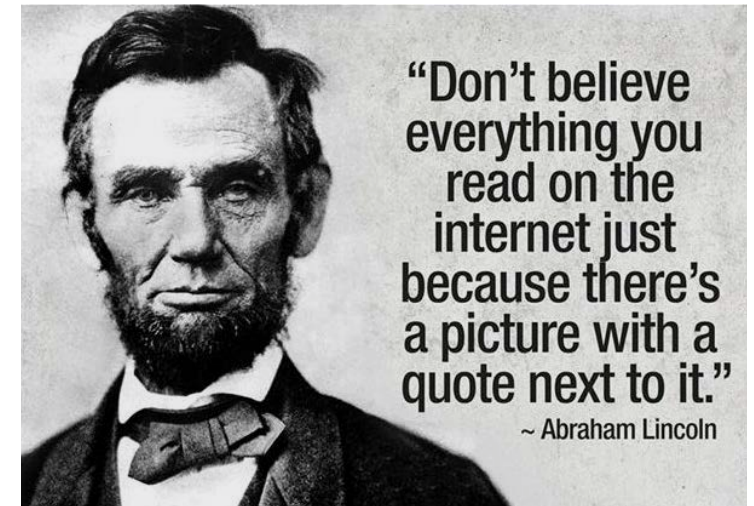
Source: **TinEye.com** search site [accessed 15 March 2021]. Available at [TinEye.com](https://www.tineye.com)

2.4 Quotes, documents

To verify the validity of a citation, find its context and determine whether a referenced document really exists. It is often necessary to use scientific publications or source materials (Parts 3 and 4). Similarly, recognizing a well-forged document requires professional skills. Even in this case, a simple online search is worth a try. Maybe you'll find the document with the quote, or maybe someone has already debunked the forgery.

Popular example of a fake quote, often used on the internet. We can be absolutely certain that Abraham Lincoln never said anything like that.

Source: Theresa Riley, 'A Cautionary Tale About Getting Your History Lessons From Internet Memes', 28.8.2020 [accessed 15.3.2021]. Available at [Moyers on Democracy](https://moyersondemocracy.org)



3. How to verify information (virtual world)

In many cases, in order to verify whether historical information is true or fake news, you must use texts written by historians or source materials. Many of them are available online.

Start by defining the subject that interests you, such as a particular event, person, historical phenomenon, the cause or effects of a process or event, etc. Maybe you want to know whether a referenced document really exists and the circumstances of its creation, or perhaps you just want to find its full contents to verify a quotation? Remember that the results of your search will depend on how you formulate the problem.

If you use an overly broad term, such as ‘World War II’, you will get a massive number of results relating to a wide variety of things. Remember to put in terms made up of more than one word, as well as names, into quotation marks. Try to combine different categories – for example, locations, organizations, names, dates and events. Start by searching for precise information, and then widen your search if you fail.

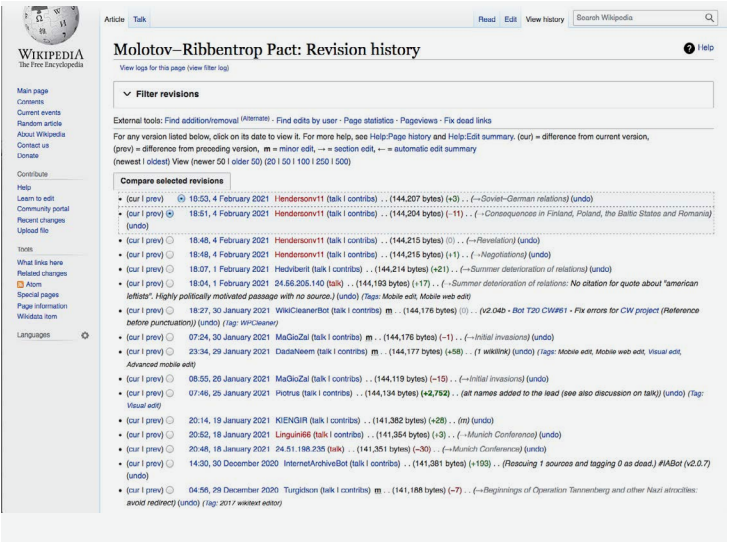
Of course you can use search engines for this, but it is good to use verified sources whenever possible.

The article on the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact has been edited over 4,000 times since its creation in 2002! Some of these edits are just small supplements or editorial corrections, but fake information suggesting, for example, that the secret annex dividing East-Central Europe into the influence zones of Germany and the USSR never actually existed has been systematically appearing (and has been repeatedly removed).

Source: Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact: Revision history [accessed 16.2.2021]. Available on [Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

3.1 Encyclopedias and biographical dictionaries

Today, when we hear the word ‘encyclopedia’, we instinctively think of Wikipedia. It is undoubtedly a treasure trove of knowledge, created by thousands upon thousands of engaged people from all across the world. The fact that anyone can be a co-creator is both Wikipedia’s greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Articles may be incomplete, contain errors and sometimes can even be used to manipulate you.



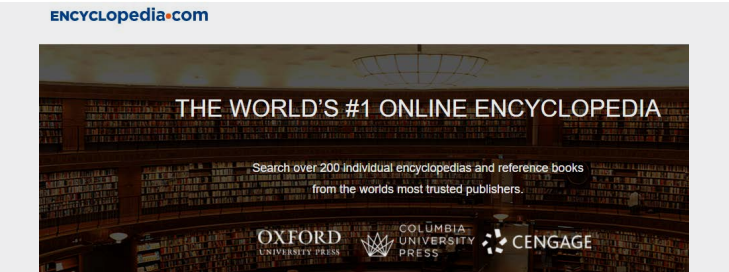
This does not mean Wikipedia is not worth using. It certainly is, but you need to be aware of its limitations and check the information against other sources. Pay attention to whether the article is supported by trustworthy citations (such as scientific publications or entries in printed encyclopedias). Look at the ‘View History’ and ‘Talk’ tabs to see if there are any discussions around the article, as they usually reflect

real-life disputes and conflicts of memory. You can also check what has been removed and why. Particularly heated discussions often happen in the English edition of Wikipedia as it is the most popular. It is a good habit to check other language versions though as they can be significantly different (remember that automatic translators are still notably inferior to actual language skills – if you use them, translate to English, as it is usually the best).

But most importantly, remember that before Wikipedia, other encyclopedias existed, and they have often been created over many years. Their resources are frequently available online today (although full access often requires buying a subscription):

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ... | × |
| Encyclopædia Britannica | www.britannica.com |
| Encyclopédie Larousse | www.larousse.fr/encyclopedia |
| Brockhaus Enzyklopädie | www.brockhaus.de (it requires a subscription) |

Encyclopedia.com is a newer encyclopedia produced by Oxford and Columbia University presses, but it is based on previous projects and reliable publications.



Encyclopedia.com enables free access to over 300,000 articles from reliable sources.

Source:
[Encyclopedia.com](#) main site
[accessed 17.2.2021]

Next to encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries are very useful in verifying historical information, as they contain short biographies of important people. Some of them are also available online, for example:

| | |
|---|---|
| ... | × |
| American National Biography | www.anb.org (it requires a subscription) |
| Deutsche Biographie | www.deutsche-biographie.de |
| Oxford Dictionary of National Biography | www.oxforddnb.com (it requires a subscription) |

Many other dictionaries and atlases can be found on the internet in order to verify information. Remember the basic rules – always check the authorship and the publisher.



3.2 Digital libraries and archives

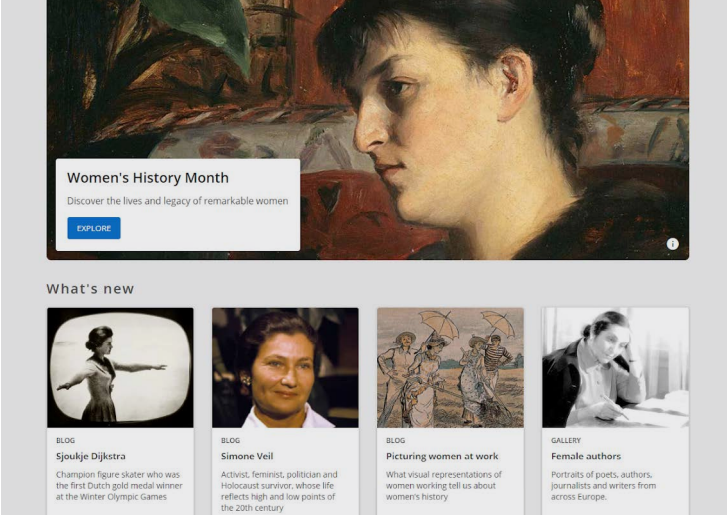
More and more digital libraries, containing digitized publications (books, journals, newspapers) and iconographic material (photos, leaflets, posters) appear on the internet. Due to copyright limitations, they contain mainly older publications, but they still give access to a lot of information. Local, regional, national, university and specialist libraries often have digital versions, for example:

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Polona | www.polona.pl |
| Gallica | www.gallica.bnf.fr |
| British Library On-line Gallery | www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/index.html |
| Biblioteca Digital Hispanica | www.bne.es/es/Catalogos/BibliotecaDigitalHispanica/Inicio/index.html |

Since there is a multitude of digital libraries, it is often better to use multi-search engines such as **Europeana** (europeana.eu) or the **Digital Public Library of America** (dp.la).

Europeana provides access to millions of digitized books, audio and film material, photos, paintings, maps, manuscripts, newspapers and archival documents from museums, libraries and archives across Europe.

Source: **Europeana** main site [accessed 25.3.2021]. Available at europeana.eu



The largest digital library was supposed to be the **Google Books** (books.google.com) which included the digitization of millions of books. Unfortunately copyright issues caused most of them to be available only in fragments, and many are not available at all. Nonetheless, it is a wonderful source of historical information. Even if you can see only a single page, it may be the one that helps you verify information you are not sure about (although remember taking text out of context can be dangerously misleading).

The Internet Archive (archive.org) is another interesting project that 'lends' scanned books to registered users.

Many archives have online versions, offering thousands of pages of historical documents. Remember that **analysing them requires certain skills, especially related to the critique of sources** 🧐. The historical resources of national statistical institutions are sometimes a useful way of verifying information as well.

3.3 Publication databases

Alongside digital libraries, the internet also contains databases of scientific publications (articles and e-books), obviously including ones devoted to history. Unfortunately, they are mainly commercial projects, and subscription costs are prohibitively high for private users; usually only larger libraries can afford to buy full access. Fortunately, **JSTOR** (www.jstor.org) – which contains many journals in the humanities – allows individual users to read a limited number of articles each month (this limit has been raised to 100 during the pandemic).

Independently from commercial databases, public projects are being developed. It is becoming increasingly common for grants to be given on condition that the results are accessible for free (open access). You can try these databases for example:

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| • • • | × |
| Science | www.science.gov |
| Persée | www.persee.fr |
| Karlsruher Virtuelle Katalog (KVK) | kvk.bibliothek.kit.edu |

Academia.edu platform enables the sharing and distribution of the results of scientific experiments and studies.

Source: Private profile at www.academia.edu

Independently from public institutions, the scientists themselves try to make their results more available. The simplest way to do so is to publish a copy of the work on special websites, the largest of which are **Academia** (www.academia.edu) and **Research Gate** (www.researchgate.net). They contain thousands of articles and also many books devoted to different aspects of history. By using these sites, you can contact a specialist dealing with the subject that interests you.

The screenshot shows the Academia.edu search results for the query "history". The top section displays "Advanced Search found 5 847 165 Papers with 'history' in the full text". Below this, there are tabs for "PAPER TITLES" (125 801 Results), "PAPERS (FULL TEXT)" (5 847 165 Results), and "PEOPLE" (1507 Results). The "PAPER TITLES" tab is selected, showing a list of results. On the left, there are filters for "DATE RANGE" (1938 to 2021), "PUBLICATION TYPE" (All, Journal Article, Book, Conference Paper, Other), and "LANGUAGE" (All, English, Russian). The main content area shows a list of papers, with the top result being "Atlantic history: history between European history and global history" by Horst Pietschmann. The paper is from 2004, published in "XV Coloquio de Historia Canario Americana (Casa Colón 2002). Actas. Coordinación: Francisco Morales Padrón". It has 669 views and 2312 pages. Below the paper list, there is a section titled "2002 My History, Your History, Our History" by Michael A. Gilbert, with 53 views and 3 pages.

3.4 Press

A significant part of historical disinformation concerns modern history. In this period, newspapers reporting ongoing events have played a significant role. Even though journalists can be wrong and the press is sometimes censored, newspapers are still a very important source of information for historians and help us to check facts.

Unfortunately, many publishers require a paid subscription to use digital archives of past issues. Sometimes libraries have access to such archives (Part 4) and at other times scans are available in digital libraries (due to copyright, they are mostly of older issues), but often a short free trial is available. This includes both archives of particular newspapers and broader databases, such as www.newspapers.com, which contains scans of over 20,000 titles in English.



Digital scan of the front page of the Oregon newspaper *The Evening Herald*, dated 11 November 1918, proclaiming the end of the war – available on Newspapers.com together with millions of other newspaper scans.

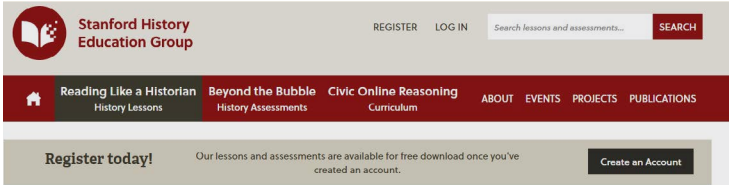
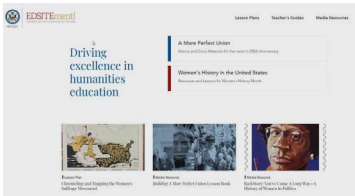
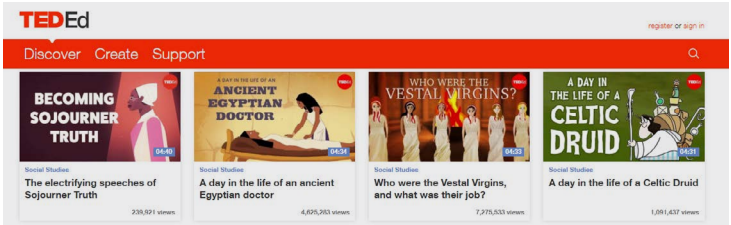
Source: *The Evening Herald*, 11.11.1918 [accessed 18.2.2021]. Available on Newspapers.com

3.5 History websites

There are many websites devoted either to history in general or to a particular topic, such as the history of a single place or event. Some of them are commercial and others educational, created with teachers and students in mind. **Best of History Web Sites** (www.besthistorysites.net) is a good guide to the best ones.

There are many educational history websites to choose from.

Source: ed.ted.com, sheg.stanford.edu, editement.neh.gov, timemaps.com [accessed 25.3.2021]



History Lessons



Reading Like a Historian

The Reading Like a Historian curriculum engages students in historical inquiry. Each lesson revolves around a central historical question and features a set of primary documents designed for groups of students with a range of reading skills.

This curriculum teaches students how to investigate historical questions by employing reading strategies such as sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading. Instead of memorizing historical facts, students evaluate the trustworthiness of multiple perspectives on historical issues and learn to make historical claims backed by

While using such sites, always pay attention to the publisher and authors. Commercial sites try to draw users in with sensational content, so their articles are not always reliable. **Even countries and organizations sometimes spread historical disinformation by creating such websites and publishing manipulated materials on them** 21.

Try to use sites created by public institutions in democratic countries or by respected non-governmental and international organizations. For example, use other materials published on



On the **Hi-story lessons: Teaching & learning about 20th-century European history** portal you can find more than 200 topics relating to 20th-century European history, with a special focus on the history of six countries: Poland, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Romania.

Source: Portal **Hi-story lessons: hi-storylessons.eu/events** [accessed 17.2.2021]

the **Hi-story lessons** website (www.hi-storylessons.eu).

3.6 Institutions

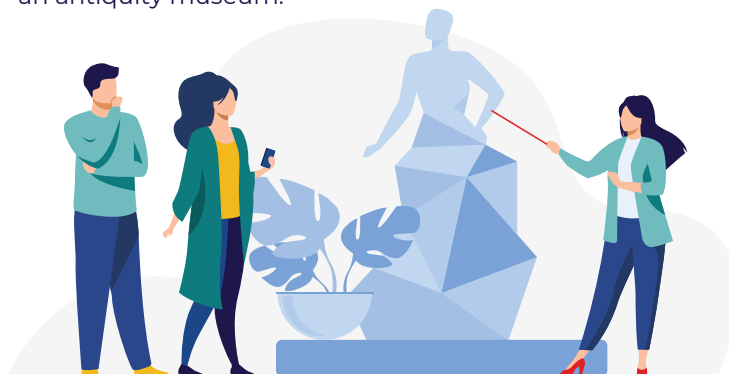
Most historical institutions – research institutes, museums and archives – are represented on the internet. They usually have social media profiles, publishing their own work as well as trying to interact with users.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is active on **Facebook**.

Source: USHMM Facebook profile [accessed 25.3.2021]. Available at [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/USHMM).



Use this opportunity to ask about the trustworthiness of dubious sources or ask for a verification of specific facts. Remember to ask an appropriate institution – for example, if your question is related to the First World War, do not ask an antiquity museum.



4. How to verify information (physical world)

Even though the resources of the internet seem limitless, there are still publications and sources without a digital version. If a piece of information bothers you and you are having trouble verifying it, it is good to try traditional, non-digital methods of gathering information.

4.1 Just ask!

In your immediate environment, there is already a person worth asking for help: your history teacher. Do not be surprised if they do not answer your question immediately – no historian knows everything and can answer every question. However, they will know where to find reliable information and how to verify sources.



Answering your question may require very particular knowledge. If you have found out who studies the subject that interests you, you can write to that person ([see Part 3](#)). Universities, museums and research institutes usually publish the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of their staff. Write a letter or email and ask a question. There is no guarantee that you will receive an answer (historians can be surprisingly busy!), but there is a high chance that your interest in the past will be appreciated and you will receive help.

Meetings with witnesses of history are a unique opportunity to deal with subjects known from history lessons and textbooks.

Source: Klaudija Miceva, Evelina Hägglund, Julia Barandun, participant of the *In Between?* project, talks with Brunn Péterné (Erdősmácske, Hungary 2016, ENRS).



If the question relates to the last 70 to 80 years, it is quite likely that witnesses could still be alive. For example, if you are concerned about the arguments of deniers of the Holocaust or communist crimes, find a victim organization operating in your country. Meeting with such a person will surely be an unforgettable experience and will let you understand more than many articles (if your teacher agrees, invite them to school).

4.2 Visit a library

It is quite likely that you consider libraries to be an old-school method of gathering information that is best kept in server memory rather than in dusty tomes. However, you're in for a surprise. Books that do not have a digital version contain heaps of information that is sometimes even more accessible in printed form. Libraries often have past issues of newspapers and magazines containing many facts from the period in which they were produced. And the best thing is that many libraries have access to multiple paid websites, which can be accessed from a library computer.



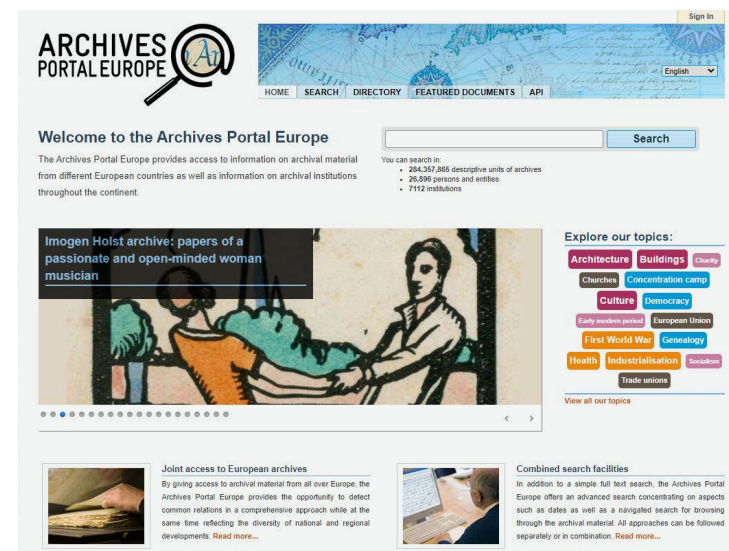
The **Archives Portal Europe** provides access to information on archival material from different European countries as well as information on archival institutions throughout the continent.

Archives **Portal Europe** website
[accessed 25.3.2021].
Available at
archivesportaleurope.net

4.3 Contact an archive

And now advice for true connoisseurs or the desperate ones who have not managed to find the necessary information in any of the previously described ways: archives keep historical documents (parchments, paper documents, photos, audio and video recordings) for historians to use in their attempts to describe the past, determine facts and the dates and course of important events, among others things.

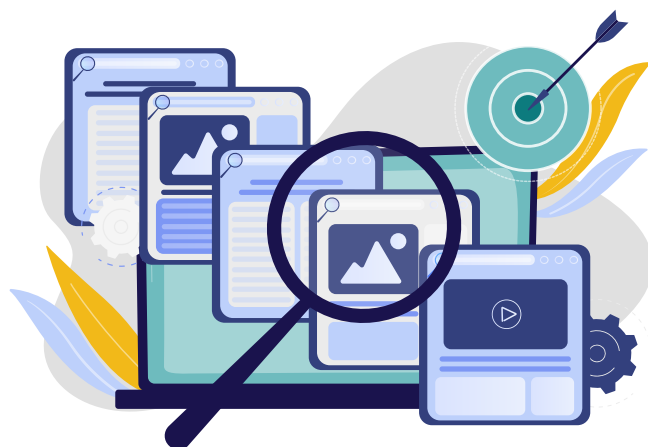
Contact information to virtually all archives is available on the internet. To locate the one that might help you, try using a specialist website or ask your history teacher for help. Still, relatively few archives make their collections fully available online, but a kind archivist may point you towards documents that will help you verify potential disinformation, and if you're lucky, the archivist may look into the records and answer your question directly.



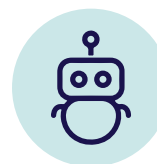
5. Good practices

A few simple rules that can help limit the spread of disinformation:

1. Do not believe everything you see on the internet.
2. Verify information; check the trustworthiness of authors and publishers.
3. Do not trust anonymous information.
4. Never pass on untrustworthy information.
5. If you unmask disinformation, warn others – report it to a site administrator and notify organizations fighting fake news and internet manipulation (see Part 7).
6. When looking up information, base your search on tested, reliable sources.
7. If you make a mistake and pass on fake news, try to repair the damage. Delete the post, apologize and clearly mark that the information was fake.



6. Key terms



Bot – an algorithm (computer program) designed to replicate and/or replace the actions of a human, especially repeatable ones. To spread disinformation, bots automatically publish some content on social media or create fake interest in such content (fake views or likes).



Denial – denying the existence of known historical facts, usually referring to mass crimes (including the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide and communist crimes).



Disinformation – consciously passing on untrue or manipulated information to recipients in order to mislead them and provoke reactions intended by the author. Such reactions could include taking (or refraining from) a particular course of action, spreading the disinformation further and changing behaviour or even the whole of one's worldview (political views, religious beliefs, system of values). The basic methods of disinformation are fake news and manipulating real facts.



Fact checking – the procedure of verifying information appearing in the public arena (including the internet), based on using reliable sources to check facts.

Filter Bubble – a result of social media algorithms, search engines and other sites, where the user receives personalized content based on previous searches, clicks, likes, etc. It causes us to not only receive targeted advertisements, but also information and comments gradually more and more in agreement with our own worldview. Users get closed into ‘bubbles’ that are not penetrated by other views and opinions.



Fake news – deliberately prepared and spread false information.



Troll – this name, derived from Nordic mythology, refers to a person who uses discussion forums and social media to attack and insult others. Such actions cause negative emotions, destroy the possibility of civilized discussion and, in rare cases, even cause permanent psychological damage to the victim. At first trolling was a spontaneous activity of individuals, but today it is becoming increasingly organized in order to spread disinformation, among other contemptible goals (see Troll Farms).



Troll farm – a company whose employees use fake accounts (on social media, discussion forums, etc.) to conduct campaigns such as promoting or discrediting people, groups, institutions, companies and products. Each employee uses multiple accounts to simulate the activity of a whole group. Troll farms both create and spread (repost, link, etc.) content requested by their customers.



7. Useful websites and online publications

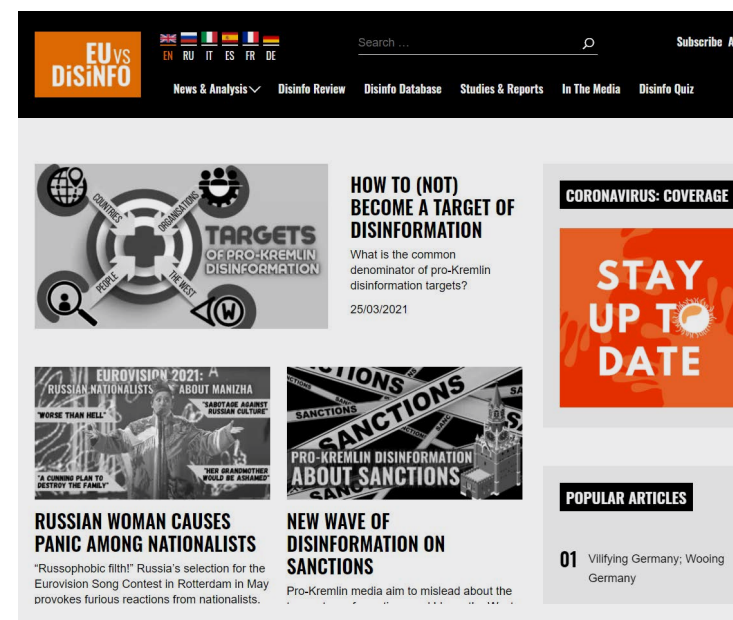
EU vs DiSiNFO

www.euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases

A site owned by the European External Action Service, which at first focused on Russian disinformation activities. It was then expanded to include various disinformation materials about the Western Balkans. The site contains a database with over 10,000 cases of such actions, including over 100 related to history, especially the Second World War.

The **EU vs DiSiNFO** site contains a database with over 10,000 cases of disinformation activity, with over 100 related to history, especially the Second World War.

Source: **EU vs DiSiNFO** main site [accessed 26.3.2021]. Available at euvsdisinfo.eu



Fact Check Explorer

www.toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer

A tool created by Google in cooperation with a group of fact-checking organizations and editors of large newspapers, providing a general rating of statements appearing in politicians' speeches, memes, articles and so on. Contains a general assessment of true / false / partially true / manipulation / legend and a link to a deeper analysis on a partner site. Contains relatively few historical references.

Fake History Hunter

www.fakehistoryhunter.wordpress.com

A blog by an anonymous historian analysing fake information about the past circulating the internet. It shows primarily manipulated photos.



During the Second World War, Polish soldiers of the II Corps bought a young Syrian brown bear cub at a station in Iran and named him Wojtek. For the following three years, Wojtek accompanied Polish soldiers. He took part in many battles, including the Battle of Monte Casino. He was even promoted to corporal. Although Wojtek belonged to a Polish unit fighting as part of the Allied forces, fake Photoshopped images, suggesting the bear fought for the German army, started to show up in social media.

Source: 'NOT Wojtek the WW2 bear soldier', 6.12.2020 [accessed 17.2.2021]. Available at FakeHistoryHunter.

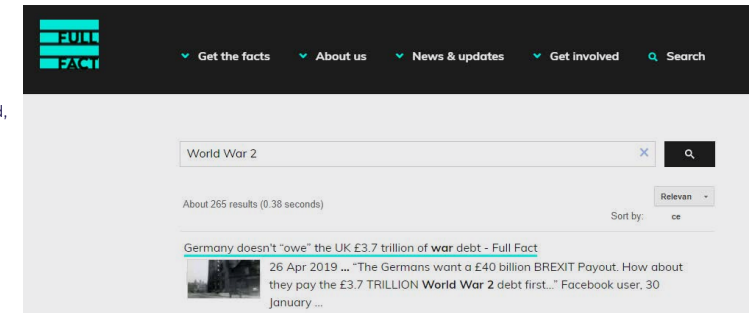
Full Fact

www.fullfact.org

One of the largest fact-checking websites, the search option can find information about the validity of select statements about history.

Full Fact is a London-based non-profit company, with a team of independent fact-checkers and campaigners who find, expose and counter disinformation.

Source: **Full Fact** website search results for 'World War 2' [accessed 25.10. 2021]. Available at fullfact.org



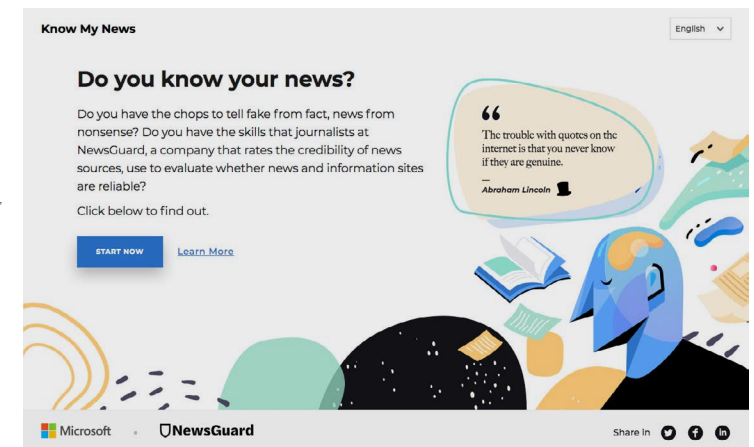
News Guard

www.newsguardtech.com

A plug-in for some browsers, it displays the reliability of the information's sources. There is also an option to mark an ungraded website (or other source) for assessment.

The **NewsGuard** portal in cooperation with Microsoft created a special quiz assessing the skills needed to evaluate whether news and information sites are reliable.

Source: 'Do you know your news?' [accessed 18.2.2021]. Available at KnowMyNews.



Snopres

www.snopes.com

The first and largest fact-checking website, the Archives section contains a tab on historical information.

N.J. Cull, V. Gatov, P. Pomerantsev, A. Applebaum and A. Shawcross, *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it. An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present, Final Report*

www.lse.ac.uk/business-and-consultancy/consulting/consulting-reports/soviet-subversion-disinformation-and-propaganda-how-the-west-fought-against-it

A report on Soviet disinformation from the Cold War period and Western methods of counteracting it, prepared by the Institute of Global Affairs of the London School of Economics and Political Science. It is not limited to a historical description: in each case, it offers tips on fighting disinformation further.

The screenshot shows the LSE Consulting website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Business', 'Corporate Engagement', and 'LSE Consulting'. Below that, a red banner contains the title 'Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it' and 'An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present'. The date 'October 2017' is displayed. A small image of the report cover is shown on the left. The main text describes the report's focus on Russian methods of disinformation during the Cold War. On the right, there are social media sharing icons and a 'Download summary report' button.

The report *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it* focuses on Russian methods of disinformation during the Cold War and their relevance today.

Source: Nicholas J. Cull, Vasily Gatov, Peter Pomerantsev, Anne Applebaum and Alistair Shawcross, *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it. An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present* [accessed 17.2.2021]. Available at [LSE Consulting](http://lse.ac.uk/consulting).

Quote Investigator

www.quoteinvestigator.com

A website verifying popular quotes, often wrongly attributed to specific people or circulated in a modified version.

The Verification Handbook: For Disinformation and Media Manipulation

<https://datajournalism.com/read/handbook/verification-3>

Edited by C. Silverman, this publication is prepared by the European Journalism Centre and is meant for journalists, but the methods of verification described within can be used by anyone. Contains multiple illuminating examples of unmasked disinformation.

Verification Handbook: For Disinformation and Media Manipulation draws on the knowledge and experience of the best journalists and researchers to deliver guidance on recognizing disinformation and media manipulation.

Source: Craig Silverman (ed.), *Verification Handbook: For Disinformation and Media Manipulation* [accessed 17.2.2021]. Available at [Data Journalism](http://DataJournalism.com).

The screenshot shows the Data Journalism website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Read', 'Watch', 'Listen', 'Discuss', and a 'SIGN IN' button. Below that, a large image of the 'Verification Handbook' book cover is displayed. The title 'Verification Handbook' is prominently shown. Below the title, there's a description: 'A distilled guide for investigating patterns and online accounts to reveal truth, authenticity and manipulation online.' At the bottom, there are buttons for 'PDF (EN)', 'PDF (IT)', 'PDF (AR)', 'PDF (AR)', and 'PDF (TR)'.



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