Misinformation thrives on social media where anyone can share almost anything they choose, and attention spans are short. Here’s a quick guide to help you understand what misinformation is and how to recognize it.

**Red flags**

If you see these common misinformation themes and "rumor cues," proceed with caution:

- "Let that sink in"
- "The media won't report this"
- "Make this go viral"
- "Do your own research"
- "There are no coincidences"

**Types**

Misinformation can be categorized based on what makes it false or misleading. The following five types are commonly found online:

- **False context**
  An image, video, quote or other piece of content is presented in a new, false context that changes its meaning.

- **Fabricated content**
  Misinformation that is entirely made up, such as computer-generated imagery or entirely fictional reports presented as "news."

- **Imposter content**
  Content — such as a fake tweet from a public figure, or a fake ad — that falsely uses a well-known name, brand or logo to fool people into believing that it is authentic.

- **Manipulated content**
  Photos, videos, graphics and other types of content that have been "doctored" in some way, such as having one or more elements artificially added or removed.

- **Stolen satire**
  A specific type of "false context" misinformation in which all or part of a piece of satire is presented as authentic.

**Why do people share misinformation?**

Many people share misinformation unknowingly and sometimes with good or altruistic intentions — whether to articulate their perspectives, warn others away from danger or join others in trying to make sense of the world around them.

But some research suggests that some people also knowingly share things they suspect are false — whether to damage "the other side" in a political debate, get social media likes and shares, or conform to their ideological identities.

Bad actors — such as hyperpartisans, trolls and even foreign agents — create and share disinformation to cause division and confusion, to promote political interests and points of view or for financial gain.

**Your best defenses**

1. Checking out unfamiliar people and sources
2. Glancing through social media comments for replies that call a post into question
3. A quick internet search using key terms from a questionable post

**Key resources**

- "Misinformation" lesson from NLP’s Checkology® virtual classroom
- NLP’s weekly email newsletters: The Sift® (for educators) and Get Smart About News® (for non-educators)
- NLP’s Viral Rumor Rundown blog
- First Draft website
- The Media Manipulation Casebook

**Mis- and disinformation are fundamentally exploitative in nature, often targeting our most deeply held values and beliefs to elicit a strong emotional reaction that overrides our more rational thought processes.**