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.

**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.

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.

**Red flags**

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

**Phrases**
- “Let that sink in”
- “The media won’t report this”
- “Make this go viral”
- “Do your own research”
- “There are no coincidences”

**Patterns**
- Manipulated text on signs or t-shirts
- Doctored “amazing” nature or space photos
- Photos of protests and crowds
- Screenshots of articles with no links

**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 RumorGuard™
- First Draft website
- The Media Manipulation Casebook