6 READING

EXAM PREPARATION • Exercise 3: *Cambridge B2 First for Schools* Reading and Use of English Part 7

Imagine you heard two stories about a man in your neighbourhood who's just bought a new car. A neighbour said that he worked hard at his job and had just been promoted. But a different neighbour told you that he had embarked on a life of crime to fund his lifestyle. Which piece of gossip is more interesting? Which do you think you would be more likely to tell your friends?

The answer to this question might be able to explain the findings of a study conducted by researchers at the world-renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They studied 126,000 stories that had been shared on the social media platform Twitter over more than 10 years. They discovered that fake news stories were 70% more likely to be re-tweeted than true stories, and appeared in people's newsfeeds up to 6 times more quickly.

While some of this could be caused by bots – internet programs that can execute certain actions – the main reason is more human. Professor of Psychology Geoffrey Beattie says that people often feel powerful when they share information that nobody else has heard about. He adds that it isn't important if that information is true, it is only important if it is new, interesting or surprising, or makes you feel a strong emotion. When you examine most fake news or conspiracy theories, that's exactly what they do. They are exciting, often shocking and usually cause an emotional reaction. And when a story does this, you are more likely to share it. When that news is also shared by someone you know, or someone you admire like a celebrity influencer, the chances are it will spread even faster.

But there is more to it than just human nature. Social media platforms are designed to prioritize posts that start trending. So once 1,000 people have seen and liked a post, it will start to appear in more newsfeeds, and it won't take long for that post to be shared to 100,000 or a million people. Unfortunately, it often doesn't end there. Some media outlets are so desperate to publish 'clickbait' stories that bring people to their website, they will not consider whether they are true. Which means it is up to all of us to resolve that question ourselves.

An article

1 ★☆☆ Read the article. Choose the best title.

A Where does fake news come from?
B How fake news spreads
C What is fake news?

2 ★★☆ Read the article again. Put the events in the correct order to describe how fake news spreads.

A ____ Media outlets publish the story without checking if it's true on their news websites.
B ____ You share the story with your friends.
C __1__ You read a news story on social media.
D ____ The social media platform recognizes that the story is becoming popular and promotes it in people's newsfeeds.
E ____ Your friends like and share the story.
F ____ The story is seen by hundreds of thousands of people.
G ____ You have strong feelings about it.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3 ★★☆ **Read the article again. Choose the correct answer to complete the sentences.**

1 The story in the first paragraph illustrates …
   - A how quickly fake news spreads.
   - B who spreads fake news.
   - C why people spread fake news.
   - D where people spread fake news.

2 The research found …
   - A people share fake news much more often than real news.
   - B people prefer to see real news in their newsfeeds.
   - C real news tends not to be so interesting to readers.
   - D there is six times more fake news than real news.

3 According to Professor Beattie, people like spreading fake news because …
   - A they know it isn't true and want to spread lies.
   - B they want other people to feel strongly about it.
   - C it makes them feel important that they know something others don't.
   - D they believe it is true.

4 According to the article, which of these isn't true about fake news stories?
   - A They spread more often when they come from people we trust.
   - B They spread quickly when they are based on the truth.
   - C We usually share stories that we have strong feelings about.
   - D They are more shocking than the truth.

5 Social media platforms …
   - A find it very difficult to stop the spread of fake news.
   - B are designed to minimize the spread of fake news.
   - C encourage users to find out if a story is fake.
   - D are designed so that the most popular stories spread the fastest.

Skill UP! Formal English has a different choice of vocabulary. For example, phrasal verbs aren't used very often because they are informal.

4 ★☆☆ **Read the *Skill Up!* Match the formal words from the text with the phrasal verbs that have a similar meaning.**

1 _____ embark	A find out
2 _____ discover	B work out
3 _____ appear	C carry out
4 _____ execute	D begin
5 _____ examine	E look at
6 _____ consider	F show up
7 _____ resolve	G care about

5 ★★★ **Answer the questions. Write two or three complete sentences.**

1 What news or gossip have you shared that you knew or thought might not be true? Why did you do it? Why do you think people often share news they know isn't true?

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2 Do you think it is worse to share fake news or gossip face to face or through social media? Why?

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3 What kind of online news and current affairs stories are you most and least likely to click on? Why?

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LIVEWORKSHEETS