

# **CREATING FAKE NEWS TO SPARK INFORMATION LITERACY**

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# THE QUESTIONS

Initial question that arose:

Can students really identify fake news in what can arguably be considered the post-truth era?

Follow up question that emerged:

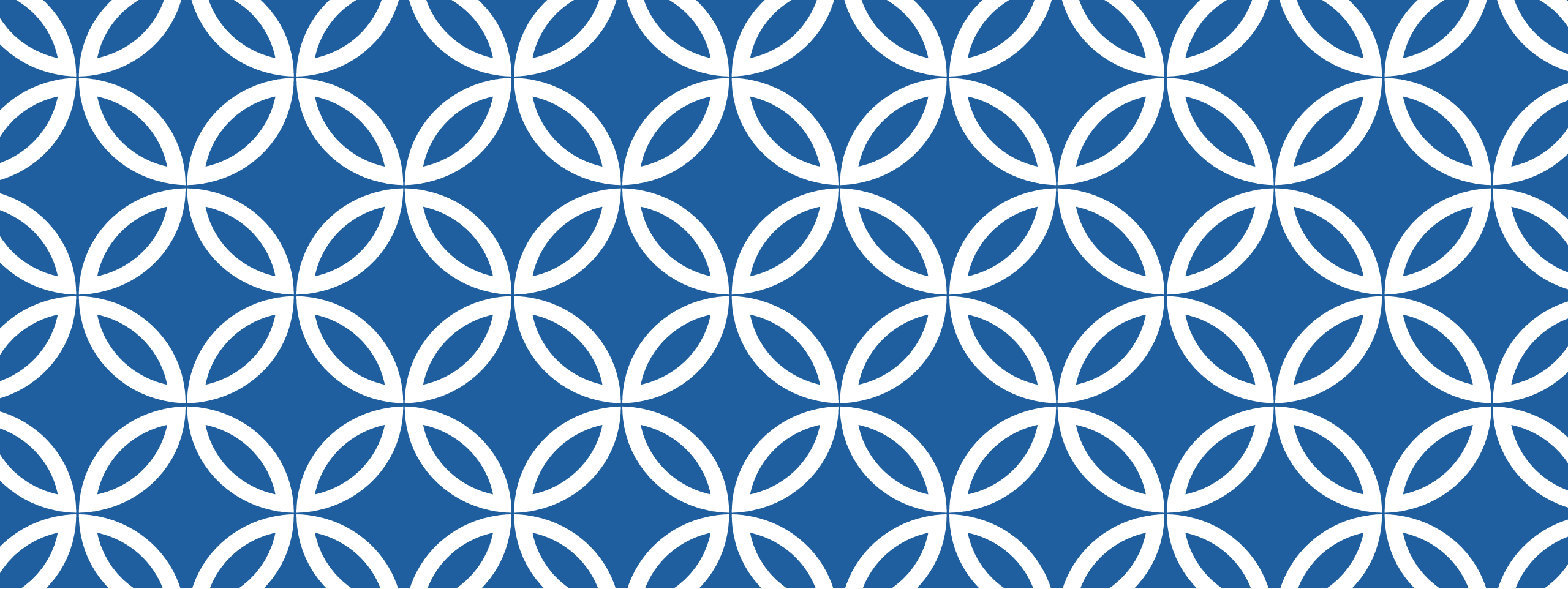
How can information literacy on fake news be reinforced in the writing classroom through the process of writing in different ways at different levels while meeting different course requirements?

# APPROACH TO ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS

Assignments were tailored for the courses.

Spring 2016-2017 semester, Advanced Academic Writing (ENGL 204): argumentative essay about fake news. Presented this at AMICAL 2017.

Fall 2017-2018, Enrichment in English (ENGL 102): illustrate what fake news is by creating fake news. The focus of this Community Idea Exchange.



**ENGL 102**

ASSIGNMENT, PROCESS &  
FEEDBACK

# GETTING STARTED

Overview of fake news during a library session to assist them.

Examples of fake news from Snopes.

The image displays a composite of three screenshots from the Snopes website and social media. On the left is a dark-themed navigation menu with the Snopes logo at the top and links for 'What's New', 'Hot 50', 'Fact Check', 'News', 'Video', 'Archive', 'About', 'FAQ', 'Contact', and 'Random'. The middle screenshot shows a featured article titled 'Did Migrants Destroy a Car in Italy?' with a video player and text stating that an anti-Muslim blogger posted a fake story about 'migrant crime' in Europe. The right screenshot shows the Snopes Facebook group page, which includes the website logo, a 'Like Page' button with 613K likes, and a 'Follow @Snopes' button with 199K followers. Below these are sections for 'Latest Articles' and 'Featured Video', with one article titled 'Did Pope Francis Allow a Little Girl to Sit With Him During Homily?' and a video titled 'Is This a Wall Around Nancy Pelosi's Home?'.

# THE ASSIGNMENT

Illustrating what fake news is by creating their own fake news.

Fake news stories had to exemplify the tell-tale signs of fake news, sound believable enough, follow the conventions of fake news and fulfil the purpose of fake news.

Their stories ranged from fake economic news to fake entertainment news.

The fake news stories were “framed” with an intro that defines fake news in addition to highlighting the prominence or impact of fake news and were followed by a solid explanation/analysis of how their fake news stories illustrate the tell-tale signs of fake news.

In other words students combined “pastiche writing” with basic research to create an example/illustration essay.

Peer review was done + students were informally surveyed after submitting final drafts.

# EXAMPLES OF STUDENTS' FAKE NEWS STORIES

**The Ultimate Secrets for Best Results at the Gym** by Will Smith [www.howtogymm.com](http://www.howtogymm.com)

Want to get a shredded body? Want to look like Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson”? Check out the newest tips on reaching your “body goals,” that were recently developed by scientists: The first thing you would want to do is lose your body fat. You must eat only 2 meals in order not to exceed 800 calories. In fact, you can live only on supplementation, without food intake, to lose as much weight as possible. 99% of people who consume supplements perform better in the gym. If that is too difficult for you, cut out carbohydrates completely from your diet. Next thing is increasing muscle growth. Train for at least 6 hours per day, 7 days a week so you can maximize muscle growth and fat loss. When exercising, rest 5 to 10 minutes between each set for the muscle fibers to relax. Consume or inject medications such as steroids to gain muscles in a healthy way. Lastly, in order to control your blood pressure, consume a lot of sodium for maximum vascularity. Also, avoid drinking water so the body does not retain it.

# EXAMPLES OF STUDENTS' FAKE NEWS STORIES

## **Kim Kardashian Attacked By Supposedly Extinct Animal While On Vacation In Africa**

Two weeks ago, Kim Kardashian and her husband Kanye West, announced that they will be spending a month in South Africa with their children. Thanks to Kim via social media, we have been getting constant updates concerning the trip. But about 20 hours ago, through our accurate sources, we came to find out that Kim was attracted by the one and only, supposedly extinct, maroon carpetnose tiger! Kim was taking a walk outside the condo when she came across the beautiful singing of the maroon carpetnose tiger. Apparently she was so hypnotized by the sound, she followed the music and came across the extinct animal. Surprised by the beauty of this foreign animal, she fished out her phone to take a picture. She was then attacked. The animal had already bit off half of her right foot and chewed on her calves before her screams were heard and she was rescued. It is said that Kim is currently being flown home on her private jet, surrounded by the best doctors. Who would have thought that such thing would happen to a Kardashian? Is this the end of her career as a beauty icon? What happens from now on? We don't know, but we certainly wish Kim a fast recovery!

[www.bestcelebnews101.com.co](http://www.bestcelebnews101.com.co)



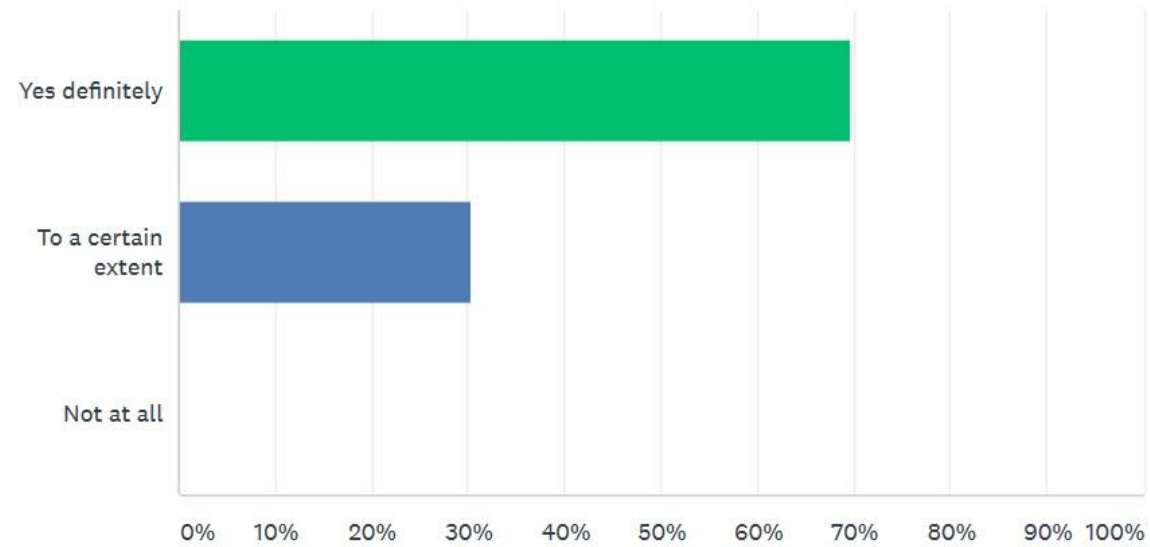
# EXAMPLES OF STUDENTS' FAKE NEWS STORIES

## **Surprise Move: Tunisian Government Closes Algerian Border**

The Tunisian government is closing the Tunisian-Algerian Border and banning Algerian tourists. After the meeting of the government with the president last night, the government decided to stop the movement of both merchandises and tourists across the border. Several reasons reside behind this decision, mainly security reasons. Since the beginning of the revolution, the border represented a national security threat. All of the terrorists who made it through to the Tunisian territory came across the Tunisian Algerian border. A minister said the borders wouldn't be re-opened soon unless the Algerian government is cooperative to assure secure safe borders for both the countries. [www.breakingnews.com.co](http://www.breakingnews.com.co)

# FEEDBACK

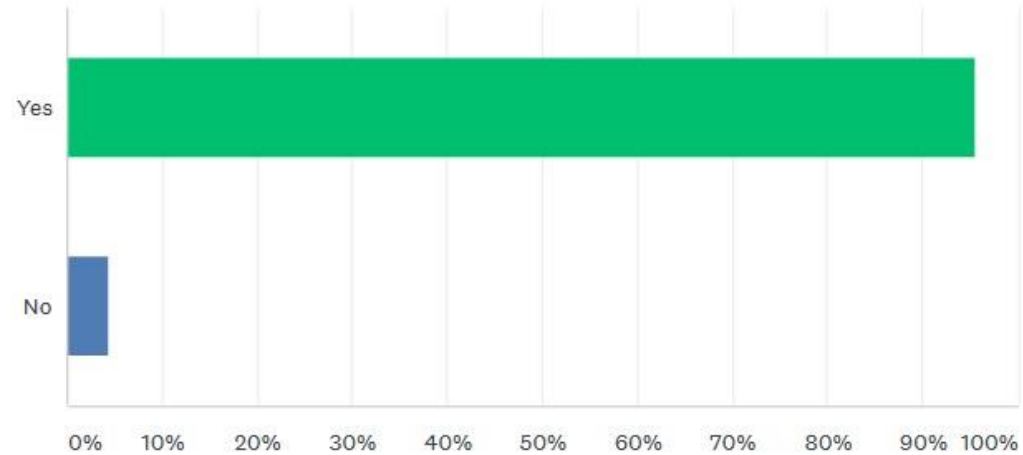
Did the assignment help you learn about fake news?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes definitely	69.57% 16
▼ To a certain extent	30.43% 7
▼ Not at all	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

# FEEDBACK

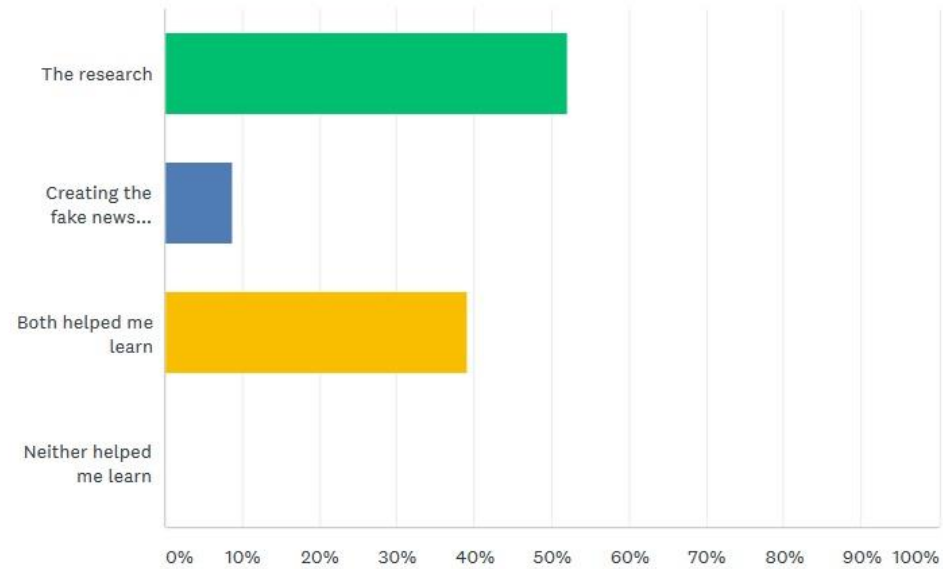
Did this assignment improve your ability to identify fake news?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes	95.65% 22
▼ No	4.35% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

# FEEDBACK

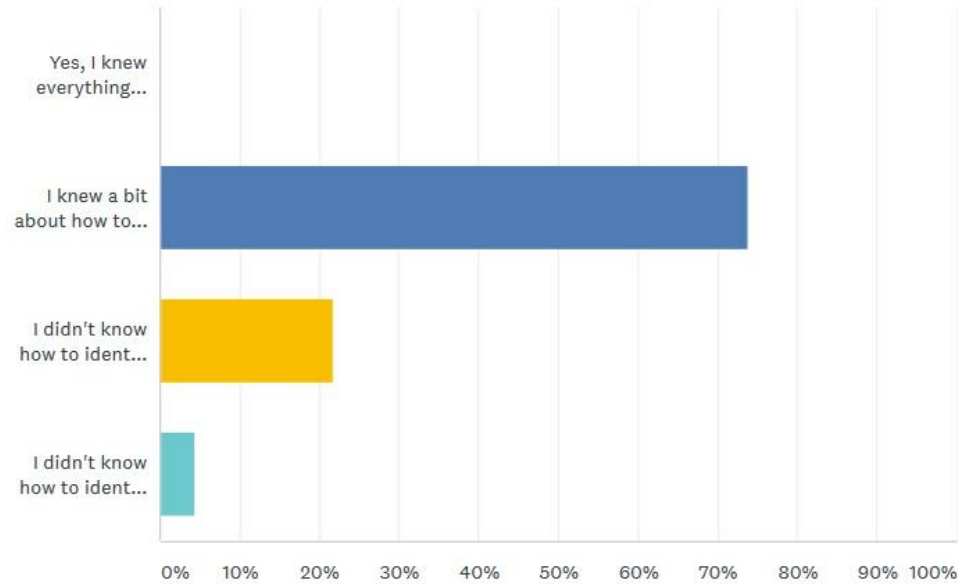
The assignment involved "creating" fake news and doing research about fake news. Which part helped you learn more about identifying fake news?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ The research	52.17% 12
▼ Creating the fake news stories	8.70% 2
▼ Both helped me learn	39.13% 9
▼ Neither helped me learn	0.00% 0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

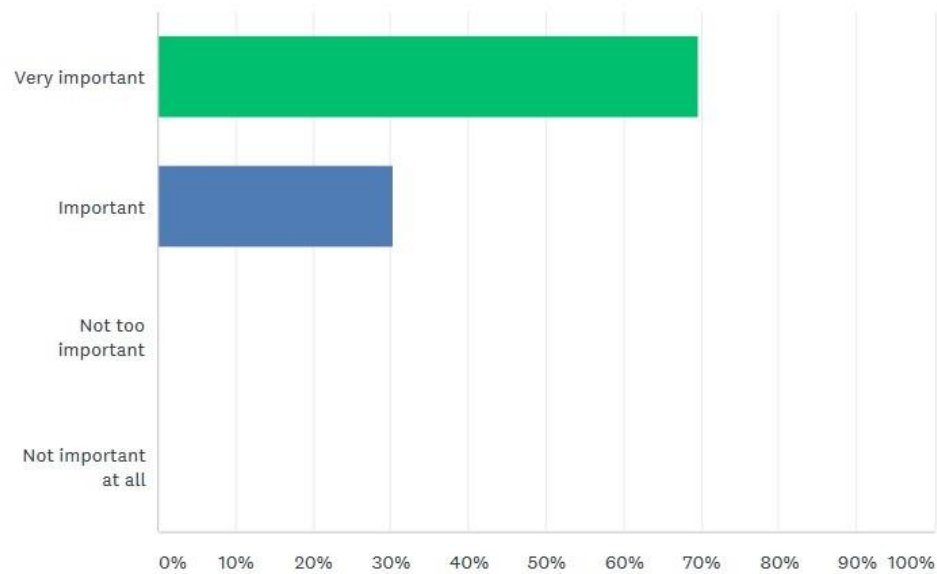
# FEEDBACK

Did you know a lot about how to identify fake news before the assignment?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes, I knew everything about how to identify fake news before the assignment	0.00% 0
▼ I knew a bit about how to identify fake news before the assignment, but not in great detail	73.91% 17
▼ I didn't know how to identify fake news before the assignment	21.74% 5
▼ I didn't know how to identify fake news before the assignment and I didn't know what fake news was before the assignment	4.35% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

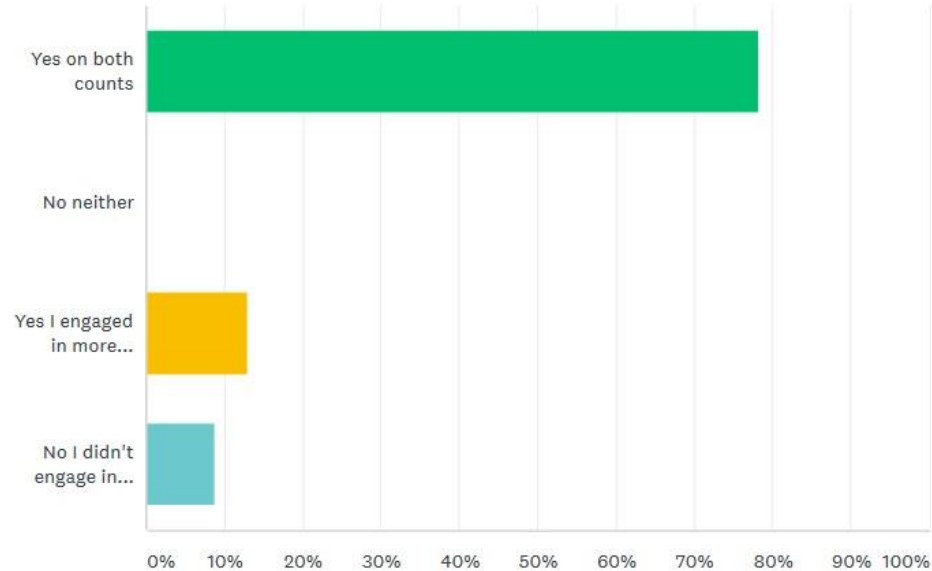
# FEEDBACK: HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK IT IS FOR STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY FAKE NEWS?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very important	69.57%	16
Important	30.43%	7
Not too important	0.00%	0
Not important at all	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>23</b>

# FEEDBACK

Did this assignment prompt you to engage in critical thinking more than you normally would? Did it encourage you to be more critical when you are reading something on the internet?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes on both counts	78.26% 18
▼ No neither	0.00% 0
▼ Yes I engaged in more critical thinking but am not encouraged to be more critical when reading something on the internet.	13.04% 3
▼ No I didn't engage in critical thinking more than usual but I now think more about what I am reading on the internet.	8.70% 2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

# FEEDBACK

“I knew that fake news exists, and the ways they used to spread these news, but this helped me gain more information about it.”

“I can now differentiate between real news and fake news.”

“Mimicking the writing style of fake news showed me how others create such news through deception and the way they attract other people to believe such fake news. This approach is useful in writing an essay related to this topic of interest. Hence, it improved my writing skills and my knowledge about this topic. This style of writing made me realize how to differentiate between fake and real news.”

“It made me realize how words can make a great impact on people.”

“It showed me that the tone and exaggeration are as important as the information given in the texts.”

“It helped me improve my writing style and it pinpointed that not all writings we find are true. Moreover I realize that the process of writing is a reflection of human thoughts that may for the aid or the destruction of humanity.”

“Writing could have a great impact on the reader thus triggering his attention negatively or positively.”

“It made me realize how important it is to learn about fake news and it changed my writing because I had to think of it in a different way.”

“It is easy to create news that will be trusted by people. That showed me that any person can create news that people will believe and live with, that's why we should not trust any source.”



# WHAT NEXT?

Algorithms that target the algorithms that spread fake news, software development and trained fact checking specialists...

We should still empower students with key information literacy skills, especially given the abundance of fake news.

These two assignments are different examples of how we can design writing assignments that help our students be better equipped to recognize fake news depending on the course and students' level.

Information literacy + writing + students:

- frames of reference, assumptions and beliefs
- consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds



# THANK YOU

Questions?