

## Noticing Passive Voice and Modal Verbs

*Instructions: Read the following passages from the article “Why Do People Fall for Fake News” and underline all passive voice expressions that you can find. Highlight modal verbs.*

Paragraph 1. What makes people susceptible to fake news and other forms of strategic misinformation? And what, if anything, can be done about it?

Paragraph 2. In general, our political culture seems to be increasingly populated by people who espouse outlandish or demonstrably false claims that often align with their political ideology.

Paragraph 3. Much of the debate among researchers falls into two opposing camps. One group claims that our ability to reason is hijacked by our partisan convictions: that is, we’re prone to rationalization. The other group – to which the two of us belong – claims that the problem is that we often fail to exercise our critical faculties: that is, we’re mentally lazy.

Paragraph 4. However, recent research suggests a silver lining to the dispute: Both camps appear to be capturing an aspect of the problem. Once we understand how much of the problem is a result of rationalization and how much a result of laziness, and as we learn more about which factor plays a role in what types of situations, we’ll be better able to design policy solutions to help combat the problem.

Paragraph 5. The rationalization camp, which has gained considerable prominence in recent years, is built around a set of theories contending that when it comes to politically charged issues, people use their intellectual abilities to persuade themselves to believe what they want to be true rather than attempting to actually discover the truth.

Paragraph 6. Some of the most striking evidence used to support this position comes from an influential 2012 study in which the law professor Dan Kahan and his colleagues found that the degree of political polarization on the issue of climate change was greater among people who scored higher on measures of science literacy and numerical ability than it was among those who scored lower on these tests. Apparently, more “analytical” Democrats were better able to convince themselves that climate change was a problem, while more “analytical” Republicans were better able to convince themselves that climate change was not a problem. Professor Kahan has found similar results in, for example, studies about gun control in which he experimentally manipulated the partisan slant of information that participants were asked to assess.

Paragraph 7. The implications here are profound: Reasoning can exacerbate the problem, not provide the solution, when it comes to partisan disputes over facts. Further evidence cited in support of this of argument comes from a 2010 study by the political

scientists Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, who found that appending corrections to misleading claims in news articles **can** sometimes **backfire**: Not only did corrections fail to reduce misperceptions, but they also sometimes increased them. It seemed as if people who were ideologically inclined to believe a given falsehood worked so hard to come up with reasons that the correction was wrong that they came to believe the falsehood even more strongly.

Paragraph 9. This body of evidence suggests that the main factor explaining the acceptance of fake news **could be** cognitive laziness, especially in the context of social media, where news items are often skimmed or merely glanced at.

Paragraph 10. To test this possibility, we recently ran a set of studies in which participants of various political persuasions indicated whether they believed a series of news stories. We showed them real headlines taken from social media, some of which were true and some of which were false. We gauged whether our participants would engage in reasoning or “go with their gut” by having them complete something called the cognitive reflection test, a test widely used in psychology and behavioral economics. It consists of questions with intuitively compelling but incorrect answers, which **can be easily shown** to be wrong with a modicum of reasoning.

Paragraph 11. In follow-up studies yet to be published, we have shown that this finding was replicated using a pool of participants that was nationally representative with respect to age, gender, ethnicity and region of residence, and that it applies not just to the ability to discern true claims from false ones but also to the ability to identify excessively partisan coverage of true events.

Paragraph 12. Our results strongly suggest that somehow cultivating or promoting our reasoning abilities **should be** part of the solution to the kinds of partisan misinformation that circulate on social media. And other new research provides evidence that even in highly political contexts, people are not as irrational as the rationalization camp contends.

Paragraph 13. Our argument is that cases in which our reasoning goes awry — which are surprising and attention-grabbing — seem to be exceptions rather than the rule. Reason is not always, or even typically, held captive by our partisan biases. In many and perhaps most cases, it seems, reason does promote the formation of accurate beliefs.

Paragraph 14. Our research suggests that the solution to politically charged misinformation **should involve** devoting resources to the spread of accurate information and to training or encouraging people to think more critically. You aren't doomed to be unreasonable, even in highly politicized times. Just remember that this is also true of people you disagree with.

## Error Correction – Passive Voice and Modal Verbs

**Instructions: The following sentences contain errors in the use of passive voice and modal verbs. Find and correct these errors.**

Adapted from “Why Do People Fall for Fake News?”

1. What makes people susceptible to fake news and other forms of strategic misinformation? And what, if anything, can be done about it? (1 error)
2. Once we understand how much of the problem is a result of rationalization and how much a result of laziness, and as we learn more about which factor plays a role in what types of situations, we'll be better able to design policy solutions to help combat the problem. (1 error)
3. The rationalization camp is ~~build~~ built around a set of theories contending that when it comes to politically charged d issues, people use their intellectual abilities to persuade themselves to believe what they want to be true rather than attempting to actually discover the truth. (2 errors)
4. Some of the most striking evidence used d to support this position comes from an influential 2012 study. Apparently, more “analytical” Democrats were better able to convince themselves that climate change was a problem, while more “analytical” Republicans were better able to convince themselves that climate change was not a problem. Professor Kahan has found similar results in, for example, studies about gun control in which he experimentally manipulated the partisan slant of information that participants were asked to assess. (4 errors)
5. This body of evidence suggests that the main factor explaining the acceptance of fake news could cognitive laziness, especially in the context of social media, where news items are often skim med or merely glanced d at. (2 errors)
6. The study participants completed something called the cognitive reflection test, a test widely used d in psychology and behavioral economics. It consists of questions with intuitively compelling but incorrect answers, which can be easily shown n to be wrong with a modicum of reasoning. (2 errors)
7. In follow-up studies yet to be published ed, we have shown that this finding was replicated d using a pool of participants that was nationally representative with respect to age, gender, ethnicity and region of residence, and that it applies not just to the ability to discern true claims from false ones but also to the ability to identify excessively partisan coverage of true events. (2 errors)
8. Our results strongly suggest that somehow cultivating or promoting our reasoning abilities should be part of the solution to the kinds of partisan misinformation that circulate on social media. (1 error)