Fake news

Levels: B2-C2
Skills: Speaking, reading, vocabulary
Time: 1 hour

Warm-up (10 minutes)

Slide 2 - Discussion in pairs, followed up by an open class discussion. This will help set a general context for the lesson. Monitor discussions closely for emergent language and to ensure that stronger and weaker students are seated next to each other. The teacher could also choose to set the scene by presenting a fake news headline that is glaringly obvious and inoffensive , eliciting what the theme of the lesson could be (before presenting the discussion questions).

Reading (5 minutes)

Hand out the article. Tell students that there is a lot of high-level vocabulary in the reading and that it's okay if there are words they don't understand. Ask if anyone knows what a 'whiplash' is, and what it could mean in the context of financial markets. Students read.

While they read, board these basic reading comprehension questions: 'What was the piece of 'fake news' discussed in the article?', 'How did it spread?' and 'What were the consequences?'.

Reading discussion (5 minutes)

Do a class reshuffle if needed before the discussion (stronger students should be paired with weaker students). In pairs, students discuss the reading comprehension questions, followed up by an open class discussion. Leave space for further questions, but remind students that the bolded words will be looked at in the next exercise.

Focus on vocabulary task - (10 minutes)

Students work in pairs to match the bolded terms from the text with their definitions. Monitor closely for correct answers, and then call on these students in open class.

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Discussion using vocabulary in context - (15 minutes)

Discussion in pairs - approximately 2 minutes per slide, with ideas shared in open class in between. Alternatively, teachers could choose to board all seven discussion questions while the students are working on the previous task, and do one big open class discussion at the end.

Find fake news! Activity and discussion - (15 minutes)

Find some fake news! Students must find a piece of 'fake news' in pairs, which they will present to their fellow students. (5 minutes) Instead of a pair-by-pair presentation, teachers can have the students walking around swapping fake news stories. (5 minutes)

Open class - ask students which fake news story they were told, answering as many of the questions as they can. (5 minutes)

Follow-up task / for homework

Students write a short article about a fake news article they have found. They should try to use the target vocabulary in their text.

How actual ‘fake news’ caused a market whiplash

Adapted from this CNN article by Hadas Gold and Brian Stelter (April, 2025)

*An **errant** post on X may have just shaken the stock market, showing how influential — and unreliable — the social media platform can be.*

*Unsourced “headlines” about a potential “90-day pause in tariffs” sent markets into a state of turbulence Monday morning as investors sought any indication of a **reprieve** from the Trump administration’s new levies. The problem: It wasn’t true. The White House swiftly denied the rumor shortly after it began to circulate online.*

The false posts may have originated from a real Fox News interview with National Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett at around 8:30 a.m. ET. Hassett was asked whether President Donald Trump would “consider a 90-day pause in tariffs,” and he replied in part: “The president is (going to) decide what the president is (going to) decide.”

According to CNN’s analysis, the first X post to claim Hassett said Trump would consider a 90-day pause in tariffs came at 10:11 a.m. ET from an account called “Hammer Capital” with the handle “yourfavorito,” which has barely 1,000 followers.

*At about 10:12 a.m., CNN’s Vanessa Yurkevich, who was on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, said that cheers had broken out, as stock indices — which were already recovering from early-morning lows — suddenly **surged**.*

“Walter Bloomberg,” an account with a much larger following, had copy-and-pasted the original rumor.

*On CNBC, anchors were seemingly **baffled**, wondering what was causing the **turnaround**. “I think we can go with this headline. Apparently Hassett’s been saying Trump will consider a 90-day pause in tariffs for all countries except for China,” anchor Carl Quintanilla said. Stocks would later decline as the White House firmly denied the supposed headline.*

The “Walter Bloomberg” account appears to borrow its name from the Bloomberg financial news service to gain credibility. The account, which has more than 800,000 followers, often posts accurate news flashes from Bloomberg, Reuters and other outlets. “Hammer Capital” also posts headlines, as well as stock market memes.

Both that account and "Hammer Capital" do not publicize their real identities. Both have blue checkmarks on X, which used to indicate the account holder's identity had been verified. But when Musk took over the service formerly known as Twitter, he turned the blue checkmark into a paid service, meaning anyone could pay to appear verified and have their posts boosted on others' timelines.

"Hammer Capital" denied making up the headline: "To be as abundantly clear as possible, trading desks started sending out this headline at 10:09. I was ***regurgitating*** *what the market was reacting to, to my 600 followers. It was an incorrect interpretation of a Fox News interview," they posted on Monday afternoon.*

Wherever the original source of the incorrect headline came from, it was ***amplified*** *by trusted sources in financial news, creating a very expensive lesson in the value of accurate and reliable reporting.*

Exercise: Focus on vocabulary

Task 1: Match the bolded words and phrases to their definitions below

Word/phrase	**Definition**
Reprieve (n)	
Errant (a)	
Surge (v)	
Baffled (a)	
Turnaround (n)	
Regurgitate (v)	
Amplify (v)	

- confused
- enlarge upon or add detail to (a story or statement)
- an abrupt or unexpected change, especially one that results in a more favourable situation
- suddenly spike or increase
- to give relief for a time
- erring or straying from the accepted course or standards
- repeat (information) without analysing or comprehending it

Answer key: Focus on vocabulary

Task 1: Match the bolded words and phrases to their definitions below

Word/phrase	Definition
Reprieve (n)	to give relief for a time
Errant (a)	erring or straying from the accepted course or standards
Surge (v)	suddenly spike or increase
Baffled (a)	confused
Turnaround (n)	an abrupt or unexpected change, especially one that results in a more favourable situation
Regurgitate (v)	repeat (information) without analysing or comprehending it
Amplify (v)	enlarge upon or add detail to (a story or statement)