

## Misleading adverts

A number of advertisements in the UK have recently been criticised for concealing or giving untrue information. What happens when complaints are made against such adverts?

1 Decide if the advertisements below are misleading\*. Compare with a partner.

**Free flights!**

Buy a mobile phone  
and get two free flights\*

\* does not include airport taxes

**Save money with our  
Platinum card**

0%\* interest on purchases for 6 months

\* Typical 14.9% APR (variable) after 6 months

APR = Annual percentage rate

**Lose 10lbs in 4 days**

This fun and easy 4-day diet  
includes all natural foods –  
start today!

**\*Misleading** /misli:diŋ/ (adj)  
intended or likely to make someone believe  
something that is incorrect or not true.

(Definition from *Macmillan English Dictionary*. Text © Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2002)

2 Scan the article and underline the names of any companies.

**True, fair and honest?** When is a free flight not a 'free' flight? A website selling mobile phones in the UK offered 'free' flights to customers who bought certain handsets. It has been asked to remove the claim, because the flights were not completely free – customers have to pay taxes and charges.

In another case last month, AXA Sun Life was fined £500,000 over misleading life insurance advertisements. The FSA (Financial Services Authority) imposed the fine after adverts for two AXA products, an endowment policy and a life insurance policy, were judged liable to deceive customers. The FSA said the adverts concentrated on benefits and ignored the risks. In the UK, all adverts for credit cards and store cards now need to show the typical interest payable (APR) more prominently.

Advertising is a fiercely competitive, multi-million dollar industry. Not only are some adverts judged to be misleading – many are considered offensive in some way. Opium's advert with model Sophie Dahl was considered too risqué – not when it appeared in magazines, but as a billboard near schools. In the 1990s, Benetton shocked many with their graphic advert featuring a photograph of a new born baby. The company argued that this shock tactic was part of their image.

Complaints about misleading or offensive adverts now go to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which expects to receive 24,000 complaints in the next 12 months. The key question is whether the advertisers' claims can be substantiated. So, when you read an advert about dieting, think: Can you really lose that weight? If a claim looks too good to be true, it probably is!

3 Read the article again. What happened in each of the cases mentioned?

4 Think of a well-known advertisement. Which of the following adjectives can you use to describe it?

<b>misleading</b>	<b>fair</b>	<b>honest</b>	<b>incorrect</b>
<b>shocking</b>	<b>offensive</b>	<b>true</b>	<b>risqué</b>

5 Work in small groups. List three advertisements which you feel are very good. Decide why. Describe each advert to the rest of the class. Vote for the best advertisement.