THE STUDENT GUIDE TO NEWS LITERACY

HOW TO BE A CRITICAL NEWS CONSUMER

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The Student Guide to News Literacy

How to Be a Critical News Consumer

1. How news savvy are you?
2. Where do you access news?
3. Why does news literacy matter?
4. What is news literacy?
6. News Literacy Strategies
22. News Literacy Resources

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How news savvy are you?

News helps us make sense of our world and understand how important events, issues, people, and policies affect our lives, our family, community and country, and the global society in which we live.

Do you follow the news?

What news stories do you read?

Where do you get your news?

Most college students do not closely follow national or international news... unless it is a breaking story or happens to catch their eye when they’re keeping up with news about entertainment, celebrities, sports, personal health or other interests on their digital devices.

You may not realize that there is a skill to reading the news, no matter what the content - distinguishing fact from opinion, information from misinformation, and trustworthy from untrustworthy sources. Knowing how to critically read the news can empower you and your understanding of the world.

Take the News Survey and get news literate!
Where do you access news?

In the emergent digital culture, there are new ways evolving every day to access local, national, and international news.

Traditional news media - such as print newspapers and magazines and TV and radio news broadcasts - are converging with new digital technologies and morphing into a multitude of online news platforms that compete with search engines, news aggregators, blogs, and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit.

With news available on-demand from a diversity of sources, our personal news habits are changing: we tend to find news we want in the formats we prefer on devices that fit our needs at the time.

Do you access news from traditional print or broadcast outlets or their online editions?

Or do you get news from social media and apps on your mobile device?

Do you check multiple sources and compare news outlets?

Is the reporting accurate, fair and balanced? How do you know?
Why does news literacy matter?

News shapes the way we see the world and affects our experiences. The choices news media make have the power to set the public’s “agenda” - the stories emphasized in the news tell us which issues and events to think about and how much importance we should assign them based on the amount and type of coverage.

At a time when emergent digital technologies are redefining news, it is more important than ever to understand who is responsible for deciding what is news and how it gets reported, and the impact these decisions have on our lives.

News literacy skills help us become informed and engaged citizens who actively participate in the world:

- **Distinguish between professional journalists and citizen voices, bloggers, pundits, information spinners, and qualified experts**
- **Detect news bias and balance, determine fairness and objectivity, check facts, statistics, source credibility, and visual accuracy.**
What is news literacy?

News literacy is the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate news stories created by professional journalists in news organizations - both traditional and new media - as well as by citizen journalists, bloggers, and others, including ordinary people like yourself.

It is also the ability to reflect on the news process and its impact on our construction of social reality and take action to meaningfully participate in a democratic society.
Digital and media literacy is the ability to...

Access: Make responsible choices using media and technology tools and apply critical thinking skills to find and share appropriate, relevant, and reliable information to guide your knowledge, beliefs and actions.

Analyze: Know how to decode and make sense of information and examine the content to ascertain purpose, point of view, accuracy, and currency.

Evaluate: Determine value, quality, and relevance of the content while considering potential effects of messages on yourself and others.

Create: Use appropriate technologies to produce and disseminate messages with awareness of purpose, audience, creative techniques, and potential effects.

Reflect: Apply social responsibility and ethical principles to your personal and public identity and communication behavior, and to your lived experience as a citizen in the digital media culture.

Act: Take social action individually or collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems and to participate in one’s community locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.
NEWS LITERACY STRATEGIES

MEDIA LITERACY CORE CONCEPTS AND KEY QUESTIONS

7. Media Literacy and News Literacy

8. Media Literacy Core Concepts

9-13. News Literacy Key Questions
Media literacy is an inquiry-based skill that expands the definition of literacy beyond reading and writing to critical thinking about the thousands of messages we see, hear, read, and create every day using print, audio, video, and multimedia technologies.

That means questioning and challenging the messages we consume and create in all forms of print and digital media — when we watch TV, movies and videos, play video and computer games, read magazines, newspapers and books, listen to music, visit websites, use apps, interact on social media, drive or walk by billboards, posters and ads on busses and buildings, even decipher skywriting!

News literacy strategies start with the basic media literacy core concepts and pose key questions about the news process.

News literate individuals know how to ask the right questions about the way a news story is constructed, its purpose and underlying message, and the meaning it has for different people.
Media Literacy Core Concepts

Media messages are constructed

Each medium uses a unique “language” of creative techniques and structural elements to construct the message

Media messages are representations of social reality with embedded values and points of view

Media messages are produced for particular purposes — most often for profit

People interpret the same message differently based on individual knowledge, skills, beliefs, and experience

Adapted from the media literacy framework developed by The Center for Media Literacy
What You Need to Know:

News messages are constructed based on certain criteria — or news values — determined by a news staff who decides how to frame the story and how much prominence to give its coverage for the audience it serves.

News staffs are comprised of many types of media professionals who play a gatekeeping role in the news production process to gather, report, and disseminate information:

- publishers, general managers,
- news directors, editors, reporters,
- editorial writers, op-ed columnists,
- political cartoonists, copy writers,
- headline and caption writers,
- graphic artists and designers,
- photographers, videographers,
- researchers, fact-checkers,
- marketing and advertisers, etc.

Key Questions:

Who created the message?
Who wrote, edited, designed, produced, and distributed the message - news brief, feature, interview, review, analysis, editorial, op-ed or other news story?

How credible is the source?
How do you know?

When was it published, broadcast or posted?
How do you know?

Who is the target audience?
How do you know?
Each medium uses a unique “language” of creative techniques and structural elements to construct messages.

**What You Need to Know:**

News media construct messages with words, images, graphics, sounds, video, and multimedia using creative, technical, and stylistic rules specific to the type of story and delivery system for the respective print, electronic or digital news content.

News storytelling uses a variety of [narrative frames](#) that drive the nature of the [story structure](#)—[news brief](#), [feature](#), [editorial](#), [sports](#) or other type of story.

News media also use specific terms to describe the news process and the [parts of a news story](#), [news page](#) or newscast.

**Key Questions:**

Which medium, format, and techniques are used to report the story? Why?

Is it a straight news account, feature, editorial, sports or other type of story?

How do the limits or advantages of the creative, technical or structural conventions of a particular medium or story type affect the news coverage?
What You Need to Know:

News is an account of an event that presents a view of reality. How news stories are reported by journalists, who have their own values, attitudes, and perceptions of social reality, often interweave social, political, cultural or folkloric messages to provide perspective. In turn, these stories shape news audiences’ view of the world.

To ensure the rights of citizens to truthful and unbiased information, news reporting practices and standards are guided by core principles of journalism and professional codes of ethics.

Key Questions:

How does the news story represent the real life event?

Is the message fact, opinion, satire, dramatization or something else?

What are the underlying values and points of view of the message?

What is implied but not stated?

What is left out that might be important?

How might news values and the news-gathering process affect objectivity, bias, accuracy, fairness and balance in reporting the story?
Media messages are produced for particular purposes — most often for profit.

**What You Need to Know:**

Media messages - whether news, entertainment or advertising - are produced to focus audience attention on a topic, issue, person, place or product for one or more purposes:  
- to inform
- to entertain
- to educate
- to transmit culture
- to preserve history
- to persuade
- to make money

**Key Questions:**

What is the purpose of the message - is it to inform, entertain, persuade, and/or profit?

Who owns, controls, pays for, and profits from the message?

How does the purpose affect the news storytelling and audience’s understanding of the news event?
People understand the same message differently based on individual knowledge, skills, beliefs, and experience.

**What You Need to Know:**

People construct their own meaning from messages depending on their prior knowledge, skills, and experience, as well as their preexisting values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

The bottom line is: No two people are influenced by media in exactly the same way.

**Key Questions:**

What meaning does the message have for different people based on their age, gender, sexual identity, income, race, education, ethnicity, cultural heritage, upbringing, religion, politics, abilities or appearance?

What do you, your friends, family, and others with similar or different beliefs, values, and attitudes take away from the same message?

Who might benefit or be harmed socially, emotionally, physically, financially or politically? How might it affect the democratic process?

How does it affect your knowledge, feelings, and actions or the way you relate to other people?
TOOLS FOR DECONSTRUCTING NEWS

THE LANGUAGE OF NEWS

15 News Values: Story Criteria

16 News Storytelling: Narrative Frames

17 News Story Structures

18 Examples of News Story Structures

19 Elements of a News Page

20 Elements of a News Story

21 News Audiences: Agenda-Setting Effect
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Values: Story Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeliness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How recent or current is the event?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proximity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How relevant or nearby is the event to the intended audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact or Importance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How many does the event impact and how far-reaching are its consequences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Interest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the story relatable or inspirational about someone overcoming the odds or reaching a goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict or Controversy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the story negative news or positive news?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensationalism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the story unpredictable or amazing, even shocking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prominence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the newsmaker a prominent person, public figure or celebrity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Novelty or Oddity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the event unusual, different or strange? “Man bites dog” or “dog bites man”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Pew Research Journalism Project, Framing the News
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Frames</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story</td>
<td>Focus on conflict inherent to situation or brewing among players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Emphasis on points of agreement around an event or issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjecture</td>
<td>Focus on speculation about what is to come in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story</td>
<td>Explain the process or how something works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlook</td>
<td>How current news fits into history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Race</td>
<td>Who is winning or who is losing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>Describe ongoing trend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Explored</td>
<td>Explore a particular policy and its impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Response or reaction from one of the major players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality Check</td>
<td>Close look into the truth about a statement or information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrongdoing Exposed</td>
<td>Uncovering wrongdoing or injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Profile</td>
<td>Profile of a newsmaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Pew Research Journalism Project, Framing the News
Basic News Story: Story Structures

The most common structure for a straight news account is the inverted pyramid style. The story starts with the lead that summarizes key facts with 5W’s and H - who, what, when, where, why, and how - followed with the next most newsworthy information in descending order of importance, ending with nonessential details to understanding the story. **Story type: hard news briefs or breaking news**

Martini glass or hourglass uses a chronology narrative that tells how the event unfolded. The story begins with an inverted-pyramid summary of key facts, then details a step-by-step account of the event, ending with a kicker or strong quote. **Story type: crimes, disasters or dramatic events**

The circle or Wall Street Journal formula begins with a quote or anecdote about a specific person that broadens into a general discussion with details about the topic and circles back to the person again with a closing anecdote or quote. **Story type: shows how actual people are involved or affected by trends or events**

# News Storytelling: Examples of News Story Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard News</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Editorials</th>
<th>Sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lead: 5Ws/H</td>
<td>• Lead: “hook” or attention-getting</td>
<td>• Lead: focuses on a major topic in the news</td>
<td>• Lead: attention-getting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inverted pyramid structure</td>
<td>• Answers 5Ws/H in body but not always lead - emphasizes Why and How</td>
<td>• Presents specific position or point of view</td>
<td>• Includes information about important people or events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal writing style</td>
<td>• More informal writing style</td>
<td>• Uses facts and examples to support position</td>
<td>• More informal writing style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Often includes direct quotes</td>
<td>• Descriptive language</td>
<td>• Often presents opposing viewpoints and challenges them</td>
<td>• Short sentences, catchy phrases, and expressive words to describe people and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meets several news value criteria such as: timeliness proximity impact interest conflict sensationalism prominence novelty</td>
<td>• Often includes direct quotes</td>
<td>• Often ends with appeal to reader to support the editorial position</td>
<td>• Presents story in carefully sequenced way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from American Press Institute, *Introductory News Literacy*, www.americanpressinstitute.org
THE PARTS OF A PAGE

Join stories together and you create a full newspaper page. And at most newspapers, no page is more important than Page One, which showcases the most compelling stories and images. Here’s a look at the components you might find on a typical front page:

**Flag**
This is the one front-page element that never changes: the name of the paper, set in special type.

**Edition**
Daily papers often print one edition for street sales, another for home-delivery to subscribers.

**Infographic**
These informational graphics display key facts from the story in a visual way. At big papers, they’re created by artists; at smaller papers, they’re produced by editors or reporters.

**Deck**
A subheadline, written by copy editors, that supplements information in the main headline.

**Text**
The actual story. When text is set into columns of type, it’s measured in inches. This story runs for about seven inches before it jumps.

**Jump line**
When a long story is continued on another page, editors run this line to tell readers where the story continues or jumps.

**Cutline**
(also called a caption) Information about the photo is often collected by photographers but written by copy editors or reporters.

**Teaser**
(also called a promo or dropbox) This is designed to grab readers’ attention so they’ll buy the paper and read this story in the sports section.

**Refer**
This alerts readers that there’s another story on the same topic in another part of the newspaper.

**Wire story**
A story written by a reporter working for another paper or an international news service, then sent (by wire, in the old days) to the editor.

**Mug Shot**
A close-up photo of someone’s face. These usually run small—just an inch or two wide.

**Centerpiece**
(also called a lead story). Editors decided that this was the top story of the day—either because of newsworthiness or reader appeal—so it gets the best play and the biggest headline on Page One. Notice how this story isn’t about a current event; it’s a type of feature story called a follow-up.

**Index**
One of the last page elements that copy editors produce before sending the paper off to the press.

**Logo**
A small, specially designed title (often with art) used for labeling special stories or series.

**Hospital defends maternity ward staffing policy**

**SO WHO DESIGNS THIS PAGE?**
The editors choose the stories and decide which get biggest play. But the actual layout is usually done by a staff designer or copy editor—someone with both design ability and dependable news judgment.
THE PARTS OF A STORY
Not all publications use the same jargon, but there's agreement on most terms. Here are some common elements found in a typical story.

**Byline**
The reporter's name, often followed by credentials. Many papers require that stories be a certain length—or written by a staff—to warrant a byline.

**Dateline**
Gives the location of a story that occurred outside the paper's usual coverage area.

**Lead**
(also spelled lead.) The opening of a story. Here, this news lead condenses the key facts of the story into the first paragraph.

**Quote**
Someone's exact words, usually spoken to the reporter during an interview.

**Attribution**
A phrase that tells readers the source of a quote or the source of information used in the story.

**Headline**
The big type, written by copy editors, summarizing the story.

**Photo**
Photos are usually shot by staff photographers, but they can also be bought from national wire services. Photos usually run in black-and-white, since color pages cost more to print.

**Photo Credit**
A line giving the photographer's name (often adding the paper he or she works for.)

**Liftout Quote**
(Also called a pullquote). A quotation from the story that's given special graphic emphasis.

**Tagline**
Contact information for the reporter, enabling readers to provide feedback.
News Audiences: Agenda-Setting Effect

As part of the news process, media gatekeepers have the ability to influence the public’s agenda—the issues and events that news media select to emphasize in their coverage focuses public attention on these stories and people perceive the topics to be more important than others.

How news storytelling is framed can affect our understanding of an event and influence our attitudes and opinions, even our actions.

Media use certain cues to signal the importance of a news story that leads to an agenda-setting effect:
- lead story
- story length (time/space)
- duration of coverage
- headline size
- color photograph
- graph or chart
- liftout quote
- live coverage
- breaking news
- etc.

NEWS LITERACY
RESOURCES
FOR NEWS CONSUMERS AND CREATORS

23 News Survey

24 Readings & Resources
NEWS SURVEY

How do you get your news?

What do you think about news media’s performance?

Take the news survey and compare your news habits and attitudes with friends.


WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS DO YOU MOST AGREE WITH? CHECK EITHER “A” OR “B”; LEAVE BLANK FOR “NEITHER.”

1) I think news stories usually:
   □ Get the facts straight
   □ Contain inaccuracies and distortions

2) I prefer to get my news:
   □ By watching pictures or video footage, with audio narration
   □ By reading printed text
   □ Through a combination of text and images

3) Generally, I think the government:
   □ Should do more to restrict what the news media publish
   □ Should do as little as possible to restrict what the news media publish

4) The president is assassinated. What would you be most likely to do? (You can choose more than one):
   □ Turn on the TV, then leave it on constantly to monitor the situation as intensely as possible.
   □ Turn on the TV, see what’s happening, then turn it off and get on with my life.
   □ Track developments online by monitoring news Web sites.
   □ Buy a newspaper as soon as I saw one that had a big assassination headline.
   □ Listen to radio news and talk shows.
   □ Avoid the news as much as possible to escape the annoying hype and overkill.

5) Which of these people do you consider to be journalists? (Check all that apply):
   □ Bill O’Reilly
   □ Rush Limbaugh
   □ Bob Woodward
   □ Katie Couric
   □ Oprah Winfrey
   □ Jon Stewart

6) In general, the news is biased in favor of:
   □ Conservatives
   □ Liberals
   □ Neither

7) If you heard conflicting versions of a news story, which version would you most likely believe?
   □ The local newspaper
   □ The local TV news
   □ The national TV news
   □ Radio news
   □ An independent Web site

8) Which of these adjectives would you generally use to describe most news today? (You can select more than one):
   □ Entertaining
   □ Useful
   □ Sensationalized
   □ Depressing
   □ Negative

9) How often do you generally watch TV news?
   □ Daily
   □ Several times a week
   □ Never

10) How often do you generally read newspapers?
    □ Daily
    □ Several times a week
    □ Never

11) How often do you generally read news online?
    □ Daily
    □ Occasionally
    □ Never

12) A news reporting career seems like it would be (check all that apply):
    □ Fun
    □ Frightening
    □ Frustrating
    □ Important

Table of Contents
Get News Literate!

The Student Guide to News Literacy
How to Be a Critical News Consumer