

News Literacy: What You Need to Know

News literacy is knowing how to judge the reliability and credibility of news and information, identify bias and falsehoods, and understand ways in which First Amendment freedoms shape what we consume and create in the media ecosystem. Get into the habit of asking *key questions* to analyze and evaluate news and journalistic standards and practices across media platforms.

News Headline: _____ Story Type: _____

News Source: _____ Story Prominence: _____

CORE CONCEPTS	KEY QUESTIONS
<p>AUTHORSHIP <i>News stories are constructed.</i></p> <p>News is constructed by <i>journalists – reporters, editors, photographers, videographers, etc.</i> – who serve as <i>gatekeepers</i> to determine the validity and veracity of the information in the news production process.</p> <p>The Internet has enabled news consumers who post, share or retweet news stories to be gatekeepers without regard to the authenticity or reliability of the information.</p>	<p>Who constructed the news story? When was it created? Who wrote, photographed, edited, produced, and distributed it? Did it originate from a news organization? Alternative news source? Or social media platform? Was the news story constructed by a professional journalist? Citizen journalist? Blogger? Lobbyist? Government official? Expert in the field? Activist? Ordinary person? News-writing bot or computer-generated algorithm? How do you know?</p>
<p>FORMAT <i>Each medium has distinctive characteristics and formats content using creative techniques specific to the media platform – text, graphics, audio, video or multimedia – to attract our attention.</i></p> <p>Journalism uses codes and conventions specific to news storytelling such as headline, lead, byline, dateline, inverted pyramid. Story structure and format is based on news values that determine the prominence a story is given by a news outlet and, in turn, the attention it is given by the audience.</p>	<p>Which medium is used to report the news story – print, radio, TV, Internet, social media? Is the story interactive or multimedia? What type of story is it – straight news, feature, opinion, analysis, investigative, review? What techniques are used to attract our attention? Large headline or visual – photo, image, graph, chart, political cartoon? How prominent is the story? Is it on the front page above the fold or the top of the newscast or featured on the social media platform? How much space is devoted to the story – minutes or column inches – over how many days is it in the news? How do the limits or advantages of the media platform, story type and news values affect the coverage?</p>
<p>CONTENT <i>News content is an account of an event that presents a view of reality.</i></p> <p>To ensure the rights of citizens to truthful and unbiased information, the newsgathering process is guided by professional codes of ethics and core principles of journalism – standards of objectivity, balance, fairness, and accuracy to ensure verification, independence, and accountability.</p> <p>Note: Journalism distinguishes between news and opinion such as columns, commentary, editorials and reviews written from a specific viewpoint.</p>	<p>What is the main idea of the article? Does the lead convey the main point? Do the headline and/or photos match the story? Or are they used as clickbait to attract attention and/or evoke strong emotion? What status is conferred on the event, issue or newsmaker? What underlying values or points of view are represented – or missing? What might be implied and not explicitly stated or selectively omitted from the news story? Is the text, audio or video digitally altered? Is the news coverage reliable and credible or misleading and biased? Is the source identified or anonymous? Is a context provided? Is the story one-sided or hyper-partisan? Is opinion disguised as facts? Are conclusions reasonable or based on flawed logic? Is the source selection or story angle biased in any way?</p>
<p>PURPOSE <i>Media messages are created for a purpose – to inform, educate, entertain, persuade, distract, gain profit and/or political power.</i></p> <p>The primary purpose of news is to inform citizens about political/social issues. The First Amendment empowers the press to operate as the Fourth Estate – an unofficial branch of government that monitors the Legislative, Judicial, and Executive branches for abuses of power.</p>	<p>What is the purpose of the news story? Why was it created, posted and/or shared? Is it to inform, entertain and/or persuade? Or is it to intentionally deceive and spread falsehoods for profit or power? Does the purpose affect how the story is communicated and to whom it is targeted – choice of media platform and story type? How might the purpose shape people's understanding or interpretation of the message? How might the news coverage affect the democratic process?</p>
<p>AUDIENCE <i>People understand the same message differently.</i></p> <p>There is no one way to interpret a news story. People interpret messages based on their prior knowledge, skills, experience, and preexisting values, beliefs, attitudes and opinions. <i>Unconscious or implicit bias</i> that reinforces stereotypes might affect how a person interprets and acts on a news story.</p> <p><i>Confirmation bias</i> might trap a person in a filter bubble or echo chamber because they prefer news and information that supports their views.</p>	<p>Who is the target audience? How do you know? How might different people interpret the news story? How might their gender, age, race or political ideology affect their interpretation? How might unconscious bias affect a person's understanding of the message or attitudes, beliefs and opinions about the topic? How might confirmation bias affect people's news choices? What actions, if any, might someone take in response to this story? What does the message mean to you? How do you interpret it? Does it reinforce or conflict with your knowledge, values and beliefs? How might it affect the way you act, think, and feel about the event, issue or person in the news?</p>