

Media Literacy: Measure the Quality of a Message

News, it's everywhere, literally at our fingertips. YouTube, Instagram, X, newsfeeds and more. Where do you get your news and how do you evaluate it for accuracy or bias? Can you trust celebrities or random people's information? Are they trained reporters? Do you know their backgrounds to weigh in on a subject? Sure, Major League Soccer players are probably good sources for information on dribbling techniques but political info? Probably not.

You need to train yourself to look deeper at the news, check the background of reporters and not mindlessly repeat or accept information from sources you haven't verified yourself. Let's look at ways to validate information.

Traditional news agencies, which include newspapers, television and radio stations, typically have stories that pass several tests before you even see them. Let's see how we can evaluate an article once published. It's worth mentioning here that this approach of evaluating an article works on the traditional platforms from above as well as social media articles and videos.

1. Who is the author of the article? Is the reporter known to you from other stories or is it possible to search the internet for information on this person? Does what you've found or know give you confidence in the author's research ability?

2. Look for the publication date of the article, which will show you if it's fresh information or an old article. You want to rely on current information, since it may update the story with new material.

3. Who is the targeted audience? Is it the general public or a certain group? If it's the latter, does the feature indicate why that group is being targeted?

4. Is the tone of the article neutral, inflammatory, persuasive and are there implied biases or values? Journalists follow the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How formula, which gives a straight forward, neutral approach to a story.

5. Identify the lifestyles, values and points of view which are represented in the article. Were viewpoints omitted and can you identify why? Look for quotes from multiple sources and understand their connection to the story. Did the reporter include information from both sides or just one? Could that be an indication of bias you need to consider?

6. Look for evidence supporting the details or claims made in the article. Confirm the details or claims are verifiable by other resources.

7. How might other people interpret a story? Stories usually have many angles; social, financial, historical and more. How people are drawn into a story may change the focus, but the journalists should still present all sides.

8. Images may be altered to promote misinformation. Do a reverse image search using Google or another tool to see if visuals have been misrepresented or altered in some way.

There is a lot to consider when consuming media. Practice will help you learn the process. Choose several articles. Review these to see if each of the above points were addressed in each article. If not, think about why not and if you want to cite or trust these articles. Remember, these steps may also be used on social media posts.

Sources:

Pew Research Center - <https://www.pewresearch.org>

Common Sense Media - <https://www.commonsensemedia.org>

NAMLE - <https://namle.net>

