



**A GUIDE TO BUILDING A
MEDIA LITERACY TOOLKIT**



DEFINING

MEDIA LITERACY

BUILDING A TOOLKIT

Media literacy is defined as “the ability or skills to critically analyze for accuracy, credibility, or evidence of bias the content created and consumed in various media, including radio and television, the Internet, and social media,” according to *Dictionary.com*.

Understanding media literacy is also a means questioning and evaluating what we see and read.

When consuming media you must recognize and fact-check to ensure a credible and unbiased news source. Developing these skills can help you in understanding an author’s intent and what the media message is trying to convey.

Media literacy can also help distinguish between misinformation, propaganda, or fake news that a person encounters.

A person could interpret the reliability of different sources, which can help inform important decisions that impact daily life and the community.

In particular, being media literate is also beneficial when your social media algorithm serves you advertisements and articles based only on your beliefs and views, which may prevent people from being informed about issues from all sides.

Media literacy asks us to question what we are seeing and not just take it at face value. It helps us be more engaged participants in the information process.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant to serve as a starting point on your development of a mental media literacy toolkit. In it, we walk you through a four-part process:

- **Examine:** Investigate message totality
- **Question:** Ask specific questions
- **Interpret:** Process the message
- **Explain:** Offer synopsis and contextualize

We walk you through the process by providing framework questions and examples. While not all media literacy conundrums will be easily solvable, these steps will help you process information and messages in a more thoughtful way.

EXAMINE

INVESTIGATE MESSAGE TOTALITY



Step 1 asks you to examine the media messaging. You will be looking at who the media is made for. Media messages vary based on consumer understanding. Messages are not one-size-fits-all. Considering the “who” and the “what” of the message is important for how you interpret what is being presented.

ACTIVITY

Dissect a news story from a local media outlet alongside an advertisement you see often. How are they the same? How are they different? How does messaging change based on medium, objective, or category (editorial vs. advertising)?

WHAT ARE YOUR PERCEPTIONS?

- We depend on technology and the internet for information. We're so curious, we welcome the unknown. Start with examining the “about” page for more source information.
- Along with being open, we must be cautious when consuming media. Don't trust everything you see. If it seems too good to be true, it likely is.

WHO IS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?

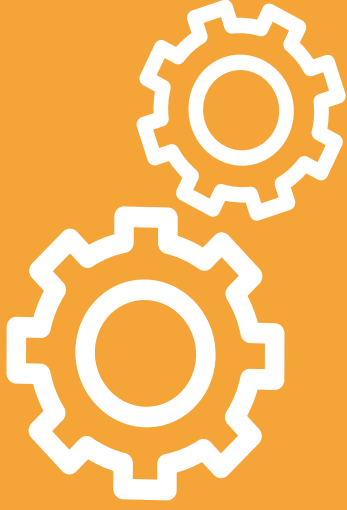
- Know who the content is trying to reach to understand the messaging.
- Content changes based on who is targeted, consider who you are tailoring to, but also who is left out.
- Ask yourself what a media consumer would think of the messaging, or how they would interpret it.

WHAT COULD OTHERS WITH DIFFERING VIEWS THINK?

- Fair content engages all sides of the conversation.
- Unbiased content generally reaches a wider audience.
- Diverse media consumers, means diverse perspectives. Welcome different viewpoints, but approach media with skepticism.

QUESTION

ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS



Step 2 asks you to question the intention of the message. How does it make you feel? Do you perceive truth? Or does it seem fabricated? Why is that important? In this exercise, dissect and investigate the media message.

ACTIVITY

Let's consider a post that could be shared by a friend on social media. The post includes the "Children are more likely to eat broccoli with cheese." Your friend adds their own story related to observational evidence: "This story is a lie! My children won't eat broccoli, even with cheese! No one wants to eat broccoli." Consider what question you would ask about the story and about your friend's evidence to get to the root of the media message. Write out questions to ask that would help you determine how you would process this information.

WHO CREATED THE MEDIA?

- Check your sources! Check who created the content, and examine what kind of audience they're trying to reach.
- Develop a list of reliable sources based on your investigation.

HOW IS MEDIUM IMPACTING THE MESSAGE?

- Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan said the "medium is the message." How would this message be received if delivered in a different medium?
- The message can transition through different channels: social media, blogs, radio stations, biased/unbiased news outlets, etc. The channel influences the message(s).

WHAT CONTEXT DOES THE MESSAGE EXIST IN?

- The medium shapes the message on how it's supposed to be perceived.
- Messages may be designed to get a rise out of you, some way, somehow.

INTERPRET

PROCESS THE MESSAGE



Step 3 asks you to interpret the messages when consuming media. When you consider a media message and ask questions, think about how the answers to your questions change your perception.

ACTIVITY

“Milk, it does a body good.”

That tagline came from the quintessential media campaign to promote the dairy industry in the 1980s and early 1990s. The television commercials showed happy children, bouncing kangaroos, parachuting cows, and other oddities to demonstrate the message. The point: Milk is good for you. Consider, though, that the campaign was funded by the National Dairy and Research Board. How does that alter your perception of the message? How does that impact the narrative? How does the delivery of the message change based on who funded it?

WHO GAINS FROM THIS MESSAGE?

- What we mean by ‘gain’ is knowledge. The message has to provide awareness or be informative to the public.

WHOSE STORY IS THIS MESSAGE TELLING?

- Clickbait titles often lure us in to a message. Social media and the internet make it easy to see the news of the day everywhere. Even when we talk to our friends, family, and/or co-workers, everyone’s having the same conversation. If it’s your first time seeing something “breaking,” it’s most likely clickbait. Who is that clickbait serving? Who benefits?

ARE WE MISSING SOMETHING?

- If the message doesn’t give enough context or facts, understand there’s a reason. Lack of information leaves you questioning. If something is missing, fact-check the sources. Confusion is contagious when spreading misinformation.

EXPLAIN

OFFER SYNOPSIS + CONTEXTUALIZE



Step 4 asks you to explain your findings in a way that allows you to understand the media message you are viewing. As you work through the steps, you will begin to understand media delivery and consumption in a more thoughtful way.

ACTIVITY

Take any example from the first three steps and explain the media messages to a group of peers. Dig into the who, what, where, when, and why of the message. Ask yourself what the message was trying to accomplish and whether it accomplished that goal. Also consider what questions are left unanswered after working through the four-step process: What other sources could you pursue to get more information about the “who” behind the message that could inform your media literacy journey better?

WHAT IS THE POINT OF THE MESSAGE?

- The message should work to educate, inform, and give context. Consider the point of the message as you consume it. Remember when you craft messages, they, too, should have context.

WHY IS THE MESSAGE NECESSARY?

- If the message you’re consuming feels important to you, that’s why it’s necessary. Everyone has their own opinions in terms of media consumption. But if the message resonates with you and provides accurate information, then that’s why it’s necessary.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THIS PROCESS RELATED TO THE MESSAGE?

- By finding, evaluating, communicating, and understanding the message. Media literacy is a skill to develop. Learning and becoming a critical thinker in media, will guide you through the context, messaging, deep-fakes, click bait, biased/unbiased information, scams, social media, and news media outlets.

MORE RESOURCES

Interested in learning more about media literacy? Fierce Mustang Media has developed free community resources to spread the four-step process and provide information about careers in storytelling.



Among the free and printable resources:

- **Informative slide deck:** Available to present as is, or adapt and modify for your business or classroom space
- Lesson plans: Education plans adapted for various age groups based on the slide deck and project principles
- **One-page handouts:** One-page information sheets about media careers, educational pathways at Delta College, and equipment to get started.
- **Downloadable pocket guide:** Print out a media literacy pocket guide for your wallet
- **Pledge card and poster:** Take our pledge to practice the process every time you consume media, print out a poster to put in your classroom or office space for others to do the same

Find out more at fiercemustangmedia.com/media-decoded

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