

JOURNALISM AND MEDIA LITERACY

“Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together”

- Joseph Pulitzer

Journalism is the production and distribution of reports on events. Journalism is said to serve the role of a “**Fourth Estate**”, acting as a watchdog over the workings of government. (The independence of the Free Press is established under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution).

- The core of journalism is **genuine inquiry**.
- Professional news reporting factually conveys the **who, what, when, where** and **how** of the event (journalists adopt a detached style).
- As reporters learn more about a subject **truth** tends to become less clear.
- When crafting news stories **fairness** and **bias** are issues of concern to journalists.
- Some stories are intended to represent the author’s own **opinion**.
- In newspapers information is organized into sections, **clarifying** the distinction between opinioned and neutral stories.
- Online, distinctions often **breakdown** (journalists prefer to be more personal).

Ethical Standards of Professional Journalism include the principles of: **truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability**.

The essence of journalism is to provide citizens with reliable information through the discipline of **verification**.

Journalism should show **loyalty to the citizenry** with an **obligation** to tell the truth, serving as an independent monitor of powerful individuals and institutions within society.

The Press is the **best tool** we have for **holding accountable** those in power and **exposing corruption!**

Many credible news organizations, or their employees, abide by the **ethics of professional organizations** such as the American Society of News Editors, the Society of Professional Journalists, or the Online News Association.

“Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.” - Thomas Jefferson

FORMS OF JOURNALISM

- News Reporting: Providing timely and accurate information in a news or story format.
- Advocacy Journalism: To advocate a particular viewpoint or influence the opinion of the audience.
- Broadcast Journalism: Written or spoken journalism for radio or television.
- Investigative Journalism: In-depth reporting that investigates a single area of interest, uncovering corruption or social problems.
- Photojournalism: Telling stories through images.
- Citizen Journalism: Participatory journalism. Popular with social media.
- Tabloid Journalism: Emphasizes sensational crime, celebrity gossip, or one-sided political views. Usually less legitimate than mainstream journalism, such as a “rag” newspaper.
- Yellow Journalism/Yellow Press: Emphasizes exaggerated claims or rumors and presents little or no legitimate well-researched news. Uses eye-catching headlines to increase sales. Techniques used included exaggerations of news events, scandal-mongering, or sensationalism. Used today as a pejorative to decry any journalism that treats news in an unprofessional or unethical manner.

INTERNET – GAME CHANGER

The proliferation of the Internet and smartphones has significantly changed the media landscape, most apparent with the extensive use of social media. Social media has drastically changed the nature of journalistic reporting, giving rise to **citizen journalists**.

The internet has enabled anyone to “**publish**” using written, audio, and video formats.

Web readers are bathed in **highly partisan content** that whets their appetite for more opinionated news. Division between news and comment **dissolves** on the internet.

Fake news is deliberate, untruthful information which can often spread quickly on social media or by means of fake news websites (websites that intentionally publish hoaxes, propaganda, and disinformation purporting to be real). Usually published to intentionally mislead readers and to benefit a cause, organization or individual (i.e., conspiracy theories, hoaxes, lies).

An intense debate is underway regarding **internet censorship**, especially as it relates to the use of social media.

JOURNALISTIC/MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Is the Intent of the media source to “**inform**” or “**persuade**”?

Are you witnessing “**professional journalism**” or “**entertainment**”?

Are you **well-enough informed** to:

- Detect **bias**? (Political journalism involves analysis. Journalists have the opportunity to present specific kinds of information and analysis which can favor one ideological position.)
- Identify **propaganda**? (disinformation, misrepresentations of fact, deliberate distortions of narrative, applied emphasis, etc.)

In a real world what is the “**likelihood**” of the event or assertion being true? Is it realistic?

- Based on your understanding and personal experience.
- Consisted with or as reported by first-hand accounts.

Is it a **conspiracy theory** (hoax)?

- The belief that some **convert but influential group** is responsible for a circumstance or event – unknown by the general public (without basis of fact).

“Conspiracy Theory = Ignorance amplified, reality subverted.” - CRL

- **Or**, are you satisfied (and pleased) that it is what you “**want to hear**” (belief validation/bias confirmation) regardless of its veracity?

Confirmation bias is the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one's existing beliefs. This biased approach to decision making is largely unintentional and often results in ignoring inconsistent information.

Users can often evaluate news credibility by examining the **credibility** of the underlying news organization.

- Was it published by the “**mainstream**” or “**fringe**” media?”
(Mainstream: professional journalists compete to get the story first and accurately. Fringe: someone makes up a story (fake news)).
- Does the news organization/reporter have a reputation for **fact-based** reporting?
- Does the news organization/reporter **retract** and **correct** any prior reporting of misinformation?
- Has the news organization or its reporters recently received a **Pulitzer Prize**?

The distinguishing characteristic of journalism is professional editing, and its institutional home is the newsroom, which curates and checks stories, trains reporters, organizes complex investigations, inculcates professional ethics, and more. – Jonathan Rauch

Have you “**fact checked**” everything that is questionable? (We **do not** have to accept anything on face value!)

- Can a voter who relies on biased sources and misinformation be considered a “**well informed**” citizen/voter?
- It takes **effort** to be a well-informed citizen!

“A man’s judgement is no better than his information.”

- Lyndon Baines Johnson

In conclusion, most people are “accepting, trusting and in the end credulous (gullible)”. To avoid confusion, remember:

- The sources you use must be **credible, reliable, accurate, and trustworthy**.
- Your “**sourcing**” determines the validity of your thinking.
- Embrace “**critical or objective thinking**” as the foundation for seeking truth.

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Misinformation: false or inaccurate information, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead.

Disinformation: false information which is intended to mislead, manipulated narrative or facts, propaganda.