



## QUICK-GUIDE TO

# Misinformation & Media Literacy

### What is media literacy and why is it important?

In short, media literacy is the ability to think critically about the information you consume and create. It includes the ability to distinguish fact from opinion or even false information and to understand how media can sometimes be used to persuade people. A 2019 study by Stanford Graduate School of Education found that two-thirds of high-school students couldn't tell the difference between news stories and ads, despite the label "Sponsored Content."

Motivations for creating such false information include financial gain—by getting people to click on sites so they're exposed to advertising—or to persuade others to take an action, purchase a product, or support or oppose a cause or political candidate.

### How do we explain the difference between facts and opinions?

Both fact and opinion help us understand the world around us. Facts are accurate reports of what happened or what exists, while opinions are an interpretation of the meaning or impact, usually from an individual's perspective. It's legitimate for an opinion to be influenced by a person's worldview, but even those who express an opinion should back them up with facts.

### How do you spot false information?

Consider the source and other stories coming from that source. Do they ring true? Is the web address (URL) legitimate? Does the "news story" seem one-sided or biased toward a particular point of view? Also, consider the article's author. Is there evidence that it's a real person? Search for the source and author to see what else they've published and what others are saying about them. While it's never OK to spread false information, it is OK to comment on links to fake stories with your own correction, to help set the record straight.

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## Misinformation Vs. Disinformation

Dictionary.com defines misinformation as "false information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead." Disinformation is defined as "deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts; propaganda." Either way, it's false information that should never be spread or relied on.

## More on Misinformation & Media Literacy

**A little (more) context.** Until fairly recently, media were concentrated in the hands of a few organizations, but now it's all around us. While this has created a vibrant and dynamic array of information sources, it has also made it more difficult to know which sources can be trusted. The need to evaluate information critically applies not only to media sources but to politicians, businesses, public officials and anyone who may have an agenda.

**Fact vs. opinion in the news.** Both fact and opinion help shape our understanding of information. The facts are the foundation while the opinions help us determine how those facts affect the people and society we are connected with.

**TIP:** Teachers and parents can ask students to take a news story or a historical event and write two editorials from opposing perspectives. The idea is to push them to see the same set of facts from at least two different perspectives.

**Dealing with conflicting reports.** Often, as new information is coming to light or even when we review hotly contested historical events, there might be conflicting reports by different sources.

**TIP:** When faced with the reporting of conflicting facts, encourage students to take their time to develop their own understandings. Analyzing and interpreting information is not a race. Ask them: How many other sources are reporting the same facts? Find corroboration. Do the corroborating sources seem to be reporting other believable facts? Do any of the sources or facts seem biased or skewed to favor one side?

**The ability to make informed decisions shapes our democracy.** As parents and educators, it's our job to help young people hone their critical thinking skills so they can analyze information effectively and come to their own conclusions. It's essential for all aspects of their lives and all decisions they will face ranging from what to buy, what media to create and how, who to form relationships with and, of course, how to vote. We should not tell them what to think, but rather should teach them how to think for themselves, based on accurate information.

## About ConnectSafely

*ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.*



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