



INFORMED CITIZENSHIP

As citizens living in a democracy, we have a responsibility to stay informed about the issues that matter to us and to society. This is true all the time, but especially when we must make a meaningful choice at the ballot box.

Journalism consists of gathering, assessing, presenting and/or commenting on news and information.

Journalists play a critical role in our democracy. They hold governments and other sources of power to account, help inform citizens about events and developments, foster debate about issues and give people a voice.

During an election, journalists provide news and perspectives about the parties, candidates and issues, fact-check the statements of leaders and candidates, and place the campaign's events in context. Without journalists, citizens would miss an invaluable resource to help them decide when politicians are telling the truth or acting in the public's best interest.

Journalism can take different forms and have different purposes. It is helpful to analyze the purpose so that we can assess credibility and potential bias.

Fact-based journalism focuses on the reporting of events, issues or developments with the goal of informing people. While it may include analysis or assessment, it is based on facts and not opinion.

Opinion journalism provides a viewpoint about an event, issue or development. The purposes of opinion journalism can vary; sometimes it is meant to critique, praise, interpret or persuade. Examples include editorials, columns and commentary. Columnists at professional news organizations are paid to put current events into perspective in order to help readers form their own opinions. This type of journalism is not meant to be impartial — it is based on the values and beliefs of the individual presenting the information.

Distinguishing between fact and opinion is a fundamental skill of news and information literacy. When we mistake opinion for news reporting, it can impact how we understand issues and events.

LESSON 4: INFORMED CITIZENSHIP

BIG IDEA

Being a responsible citizen involves seeking out information from a variety of sources and comparing perspectives on issues of importance. When consuming news, it is important to distinguish between fact-based news reporting and commentary.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

Upon completion of the lesson, students are expected to know the following:

- That journalism plays a key role in democracy; and
- The difference between fact-based journalism and opinion journalism.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Distinguish between fact and opinion;
- Analyze news articles and stories; and
- Evaluate how news and information can influence our views on issues, events and people.

RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 4: Informed Citizenship
 - *Feed for Thought*: newsliteracy.ca
 - CTRL-F: newsliteracy.ca
 - Video: Why Journalism?
 - Activity Sheet 4.1: Fact vs. Opinion
 - Activity Sheet 4.2: News Analysis
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at www.studentvote.ca/bc)

ACTIVITIES

 **Hook: 30-35 min**

Explore the link between information and decision-making, by completing the 'Feed for Thought' activity found at newsliteracy.ca.

This hands-on activity relies on students becoming informed before casting a vote on a development that will affect their community. Two social-media feeds present two very different pictures of the development of a solar-panel factory. After reviewing their assigned feed, students choose sides through a vote, then discuss how the information they saw affected their choice.

Register for access at: newsliteracy.ca

Step 1: Distribute the feeds

Create a class link to share with your class. The system will automatically assign one of two polarized feeds to each student at random. Give students 10 min to review their feed.

Step 2: Hold the vote

After students have reviewed their feeds and formed an opinion on the issue, hold a vote through an online platform or show of hands. Google Forms templates are available online.

Step 3: Discuss and debrief

Share the results with students and ask why they made the choice they did. They may be surprised to learn that not everyone saw the same information.

Questions to prompt discussion:

- What are the consequences of people consuming different facts and information?
- Do you think people should be exposed to more than one side of an issue before making their decision?

Discussion: 10 min

Do you read or watch the news? How do you learn about current events? Do you think it is important to follow the news or be informed about events happening in your community, the country or the world?

Essential Concepts: 15-20 min

1. Review the role of journalism in democracy by watching the 'Why Journalism?' video, followed by Slide Deck 4.

2. Using Slide Deck 4, explain to students that one of the most fundamental distinctions to make when consuming news is to determine whether a news story is fact-based or opinion-based.

- a) Start by reviewing the difference between **fact** and **opinion**. Afterwards, have students complete Activity Sheet 4.1.
- A fact is a statement that can be proven or checked (e.g., Canadian Confederation took place on July 1, 1867).
 - An opinion is a statement based on individual perspectives or beliefs. It cannot be proven or checked (e.g., cats are better than dogs).

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- b) Review fact-based news reports compared to opinion journalism.
- **Fact-based journalism** focuses on the reporting of events, issues or developments with the purpose of informing people. While it may include some analysis, it is based on facts and not opinion. It is referred to as a “news report” or “straight reporting.”
 - **Opinion journalism** provides a viewpoint about an event, issue or development. The purposes can vary; sometimes it is meant to critique, praise, interpret or persuade. This type of journalism is not meant to be impartial — it is based on the values and beliefs of the individual who is presenting the information. Examples include editorials, columns and commentary.

★ Action: 40 min

1. Examine a print or digital newspaper as a class to distinguish fact-based news reporting from opinion journalism. What signals are there to mark opinion journalism as different from fact based news coverage? (e.g., labels, photos of columnists, different sections of the newspaper)

2. Ask students to find two news articles from different sources related to the provincial election. Have students analyze each article using Activity Sheet 4.2.

✚ Extensions:

A. At election time, the ability to evaluate the reliability of news and information is more important than ever. Use CIVIX’s *CTRL-F: Find the Facts* module to teach students about simple digital literacy strategies. The CTRL-F module is structured around three strategies purpose-built for assessing information online: investigate the source, check the claim, and trace information to find the original context. To access free video tutorials and practice activities, visit newsliteracy.ca (CTRL-F).

B. Create a classroom social media account (e.g., Twitter) to track news coverage about the election. You can follow major news outlets and particular journalists or pundits. Each day you can review the news coming through a personalized or classroom Twitter feed.

C. For the duration or remainder of the campaign, build a news wall or bring in a news story each day with information about the provincial election candidates and issues. You could also create a schedule for one or more students to bring in an article or item about the election every day. Ask students to read or summarize their articles to the class. Debrief as a class afterwards.



Reflection: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about journalism and news consumption. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook or learning log (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- How can news and information influence our views on issues, events and people?
- Why is it important to rely on multiple news sources?
- What is the role of journalism in democracy?