



THE MEDIA

People increasingly get their news and information about the world online. There is so much information online; it can be hard to process everything we see. It is not always clear who has produced the content or for what reason, and whether it can be trusted.

We are facing a problem called ‘**information pollution**,’ which refers to the quality of our information environment. Historically, people did not worry so much about the reputation of the media they relied on, since those sources were limited and considered authoritative.

Today, everyone is both a consumer and producer of information. This means there is a lot of information out there that is not very reliable.

One way to ensure we get the highest-quality information available is to look at professional news sources. These sources don’t always get it right, but they have standards and strive to be accountable to their audiences. So what sets journalism apart from other information?

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

LESSON 4: THE MEDIA

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.

Fact-based journalism involves research, assessment and verification where the central goal is to produce an accurate and fair representation of the facts.

To determine if a report is journalistic and credible, you can assess it through some fundamental standards:

- Sourcing: Does it include multiple reliable sources?
- Accuracy: Have the facts been sourced and verified?
- Research: Are there secondary sources? Have statistics been cited, and if so, from where?
- Context: Does the story go beyond the news event to include history or background?
- Fairness: Is neutral language used to describe the people and issues?

These standards set fact-based journalism apart from other information that may not have the same level of research and rigour.

Professional newsgathering organizations have their own standards for verification and accountability. In contrast to many online information sources, the reputations of these organizations depend on being accurate and reliable. They are transparent and have a procedure for acknowledging and correcting mistakes when they are made. These measures help them earn the public's trust.

BIG IDEA

A healthy democracy requires journalists to keep those in power accountable and to inform citizens. In identifying reliable sources of information, we can look to organizations and individuals that adopt professional standards, and are accountable for mistakes.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

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

- How the problem of information pollution allows false and misleading information to spread;
- 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 factual and opinion-based news coverage;
- Analyze news articles and stories; and
- Assess the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions.

RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 4: The Media
 - CTRL-F: newsliteracy.ca
 - Video: Information Pollution
 - Video: Why Journalism?
 - Video: Journalistic Standards
 - Video: Disinformation
 - Activity Sheet 4.1: News Bank
 - 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: 15-20 min

1. Have a class discussion about news consumption.
 - If you heard from a friend that there was a meteor crash in your city/town, how would you confirm this story?
 - What are your main sources of news and information and why?
2. Introduce the concepts of information pollution, **misinformation** and **disinformation**, using the 'Information Pollution' video.
 - Why do we have information pollution?
 - Why is it hard to identify trustworthy or reliable information?

Discussion: 10 min

How often do you share news with your friends through social media or messaging apps? Do you ever check to see if the news you receive is coming from a reliable source?

Essential Concepts: 10-15 min

1. Review the role of journalism and journalistic standards by watching the 'Why Journalism?' and 'Journalistic Standards' videos.
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.

LESSON 4: THE MEDIA

- a) Start by addressing the difference between **fact** and **opinion**.
- 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., Drake is better than Shawn Mendes).
- b) Review fact-based news coverage 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.
- c) Explain the concept of **media bias** (Slide Deck 4).
- When people refer to a news source as biased, they mean that it favours one point of view over others or how it aligns with a political ideology.
 - Media bias may result from many factors, including the ownership of a media organization, its level of diversity, the audience it is trying to cater to, and the opinions it chooses to publish through columnists or op-eds, or broadcast as commentary.
 - A media organization may be referred to as politically “right-leaning,” “left-leaning,” or “centrist,” depending on the answers to some of these questions.

★ Action: 20 min plus ongoing assignment

1. Review example articles (studentvote.ca/bc > Classroom Resources > Lesson 4) and have students assess whether an article is fact-based or opinion journalism. This can be completed in pairs or small groups. Ask students to share their decision and provide evidence or a reason behind their thinking.

2. Ask students to create a news bank dedicated to the election (Activity Sheet 4.1) incorporating both news reports and opinion pieces. For each news story, they will need to write a summary (Activity Sheet 4.2) and respond to the consolidation questions.



Extensions:

- A. Disinformation is false or misleading information that is shared deliberately to cause harm. Learn about how disinformation producers use knowledge of human emotions and technology to spread disinformation by watching the ‘Disinformation’ video. A digital activity sheet is available online at studentvote.ca/bc.
- B. 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.
- C. 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.
- D. 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 the media and news consumption. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What is the role of journalism in democracy?
- Why should we assess the credibility of different media sources?
- Why is it important to rely on multiple news sources?