

Media Bias

If you have ever heard anyone use the phrase "Fake News," you should understand that there is an insinuation of shoddy reporting behind it. But why should it matter to you, especially if you are not interested in politics or journalism? To understand why it matters, you need to first understand the role of the free press in America. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech imply that there is a freedom of information built into our Constitution, even if it is not limitless.

The press is supposed to live up to a set of standards or principles, which are its professional ethics. The press clings to these ethics because it knows how vital its role is to democracy.

Watch this short video on the five key values of journalism from the Ethical Journalism Network:
<https://youtu.be/uNidQHk5SZs>

1. Truth and Accuracy

Journalists cannot always guarantee 'truth', but getting the facts right is the cardinal principle of journalism. We should always strive for accuracy, give all the relevant facts we have and ensure that they have been checked. When we cannot corroborate information we should say so.

2. Independence

Journalists must be independent voices; we should not act, formally or informally, on behalf of special interests whether political, corporate or cultural. We should declare to our editors – or the audience – any of our political affiliations, financial arrangements or other personal information that might constitute a conflict of interest.

3. Fairness and Impartiality

Most stories have at least two sides. While there is no obligation to present every side in every piece, stories should be balanced and add context. Objectivity is not always possible, and may not always be desirable (in the face for example of brutality or inhumanity), but impartial reporting builds trust and confidence.

4. Humanity

Journalists should do no harm. What we publish or broadcast may be hurtful, but we should be aware of the impact of our words and images on the lives of others.

5. Accountability

A sure sign of professionalism and responsible journalism is the ability to hold ourselves accountable. When we commit errors we must correct them and our expressions of regret must be sincere not cynical. We listen to the concerns of our audience. We may not change what readers write or say but we will always provide remedies when we are unfair.

But again, why should it matter to you, and why will it ultimately matter to your life plan and choices? Basically because there is a lot of noise out there and you need accurate information to make informed decisions. While it's great that we can get raw news from a much greater variety of sources than ever

before, it also makes it difficult to know who to trust. We must view our information through a critical lens.

Activity

Watch this terrific video on media bias and critical thinking to get a quick look at what media bias is and how to filter through the noise of misinformation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-Y-z6HmRgl&feature=youtu.be> (*How to Choose Your News* by Damon Brown, TedEd).

Now find a story published on the internet that doesn't seem completely trustworthy to you. Examine it for accuracy and answer the following questions.

1. What was the source of your story?
2. Was the story objective or opinion/persuasion? How can you tell?
3. Do you think the author demonstrates a bias?
4. What made you not completely trust it?
5. What could you do to verify the story?

Finally, let's examine the following statement:

"Independent, aggressive and critical media are essential to an informed democracy" (fair.org).

6. What does this mean? How can receiving accurate information affect your choices?

Evaluation

Students should share their article's source/hyperlink and completed questions with their teachers to receive evaluation and feedback. Students should be encouraged to apply what they have learned to their career exploration activities.

A basic rubric for evaluation is provided here: <https://www.ctecs.org/sites/default/files/files/Rubric.pdf>

The following is a supplemental resource that may help students critically examine the sources they use.

Supplemental

What makes an untrustworthy source?

- The writer is relying on incomplete information.
- The writer is relying on an anonymous source.
- The writer is pandering to the viewpoint of an employer or client.
- The writer's past experience is influencing his or her thinking.
- The writer is trying to persuade the reader.