

# Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Media and Information Literacy

Since many important topics (including many issues raised during an election) are complex and/or global in nature, chances are a bulk of our background knowledge will come to us via media sources such as newspapers and magazine, radio, television and the Internet. But how can we know whether or not this information is accurate, relevant or unbiased?

The field of Media Literacy offers ways to analyze news “products” to determine accuracy and potential bias. And any discussion of the news media must take into account the most important trend impacting both producers and consumers of media: the “democratization” and transformation of media brought on by the Internet.

Speaking of the Internet, Information Literacy (a field created by the library profession) provides vital steps for discovering information, analyzing it for quality and putting it to use. These steps include:

- Locating Information – Finding needed information from online or offline sources
- Evaluating Information- Examining information for quality (testing it for bias, accuracy, timeliness, relevance and sufficiency)
- Organizing Information – Putting information you have located and evaluated into some kind of order or categories
- Synthesizing Information – Using the information you have located, evaluated and organized to create something new (called a “work product”)
- Communicating Information – Sharing the product of your work with others

## ***Terminology***

Important vocabulary terms used in this lesson include:

- Media
- Media Literacy
- Background Knowledge
- Information Literacy
- Search engine
- Meta search engine
- Information Literacy steps (including Locating, Evaluating, Organizing, Synthesizing and Communicating Information)
- Tests for evaluating information (including tests for bias, accuracy, relevance, timeliness and sufficiency)
- Work product

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## **Goals**

The goal of this lesson is to give students an understanding of:

- The importance of background knowledge needed to understanding an issue or argument
- The traditional role media has played in delivering background knowledge on important issues
- The role of the senses in processing information delivered via news sources such as newspapers, radio, television and the Internet
- How pictures (either still images and video) can deliver facts or create emotional impact, which can potentially create conflict between words spoken or read and visual imagery that are part of a news story
- Why information Literacy emerged from the library studies field and when libraries can provide better (or different) information than online sources
- How to use a search engine (including selecting the best search engine and key words, and how to use advanced search options)
- How to use the results of a search to locate relevant sources and how to use those sources to search for additional information resources
- The importance of the Internet as a communications tool, connecting researchers with experts ready (and often eager) to answer their questions
- How to evaluating information for quality
- That information which has been located and evaluated needs to be organized (put into some kind of order or categories), synthesized into something new (called a “work product”); and (often) communicated to others

## **Primary Resources**

The following resources are available at the [www.criticalvoter.com](http://www.criticalvoter.com) web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter:** Chapter 10 (Media Literacy) and 11 (Information Literacy)
- **Check for Understanding** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has understood material in the reading.
- **Blog Entries** – To find additional examples and information on the Critical Voter blog (if available) select “Media Literacy” or “Information Literacy” in the blog’s **Category** list.

## **Additional Resources**

[The Media Literacy Project](#)

[Information Literacy Resources](#) from Association of College and University Libraries

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### *Suggested Activities*

Activity	Notes on this activity
<p>Have students read the assigned book chapters and answer the Check for Understanding questions to ensure they have understood the concepts covered in this lesson.</p>	<p>The Check for Understanding quiz is made up of questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has read the book chapter in its entirety.</p>
<p>Look at the photos or other illustrations in a daily newspaper or news magazine and determine whether they provide information about a story associated with the image or perform some other function (such as setting a mood or other non-logos-based activity).</p>	<p>In instances where images are not associated with the pure delivery of information, have students discuss what they think the goal of the image is and how accurately it reflects the written words in the story accompanying the image.</p>
<p>Choose a relevant topic (such as a current news item) and assign groups of students the task of using different search strategies (refining key words, advanced search options etc.) to try to reduce a list of search results to fewer than 100 links.</p>	<p>Explore the strategy each group used and review the results to see how closely each group’s final set of results match up.</p> <p>Discuss when some search strategies may be more useful than others when trying to locate different types of information (chronological news searches for time-sensitive information, searching through specific known sources like a newspaper site, etc.)</p>
<p>Review an article on a controversial subject in Wikipedia and compare it with an article on the same subject that appears in an edited source such as a traditional encyclopedia or online library resource.</p>	<p>Show students the Talk page related to a Wikipedia article to demonstrate the ongoing reviewing, editing and discussion regarding an article. Discuss what this means with regard to the steps for evaluating information (especially with regard to accuracy, bias and timeliness).</p> <p>Use this example to review with students the difference between information on the Open Web vs. other sources (such as databases of professionally edited and reviewed articles available from the library).</p>
<p>Provide students with a set of resources relating to a particular subject (or use the information sources that resulted from the search refinement they performed on the previous classroom exercise described above).</p> <p>Ask them to organize this material into what they</p>	<p>Discuss what criteria they used to determine the quality of an information source in the context of bias, accuracy, timeliness, relevance and sufficiency.</p> <p>Discuss others ways they could organize the information they found (chronologically,</p>

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Activity	Notes on this activity
considered to be high quality vs. low quality information.	thematically, etc.) and determine what kind of work products could be created from their final list of information sources.