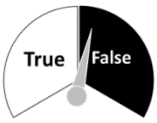
Media Literacy & Critical Thinking Online

Tools and Resources

Overview

Digital media literacy (also known as online critical thinking skills) is vital to the safety, security, health, and well-being of individuals and communities. The proliferation of social media and applications has increased the volume of information we are exposed to everyday. With the public health measures imposed as a result of COVID-19, individuals are spending more time online – increasing the risk of being exposed to false or misleading information. Becoming digital media literate can help individuals build resiliency and reduce the risk of radicalizing to violence.

Digital media literacy addresses three types of online content:



Misinformation *is false, but not created or shared with the intention of causing harm.*

Malinformation *is based on fact, but used out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate.*

Disinformation *is deliberately created or shared to mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country.*

Creating or spreading this type of online content can undermine public confidence in our system of government and its institutions. However, communities and individuals can equip themselves with effective tools, knowledge, and resources that do not impede the free flow of reliable information – a cornerstone of a healthy and functioning society. Every individual plays an important role in recognizing and building resilience to false and harmful narratives.

Key Steps for Digital Media Literacy

Modern technology continues to make the spread of propaganda and the manipulation of information easier. Social media and traditional news media sources can be both victims and perpetrators of spreading misinformation and disinformation. There are, however, basic steps that every individual can take to identify and mitigate these harmful narratives.

Consider the source	Is this a well-known or trusted news outlet, and are they reputable for the subject at hand?
Triple check the source	Sites designed to spread false information often try to mimic legitimate news sources. Check the name, logo, and "About" section to verify.
Identify the author	Misleading and false articles often do not include authors. If authors are listed, do a quick search to see if they are trusted sources.
Inspect the URL	Webpages that notoriously spread disinformation often have odd web domain names that try to imitate real sources (e.g. nbcnews.**com.co**)
Examine spelling and punctuation	Webpages with misspelled words, unnecessary ALL CAPS, poor grammar, and excessive punctuation are often unreliable.
Seek alternative viewpoints	Search for other articles and sources on the same topic. If there are limited or no results, or you find contradicting information, you may want to do further research and fact-checking.
Think before you share	Damaging disinformation spreads quickly via shared posts. Emotional and sensitive topics are often used to manipulate readers into sharing without thinking. Review the above steps and be wary of content that seeks to sow discord and provoke audiences.

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Resource	Description
DHS Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA): **COVID-19 Disinformation Toolkit: "We're in This Together. Disinformation Stops With You."**	This resource is designed to help State, local, tribal and territorial (SLTT) officials bring awareness to misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories appearing online related to COVID-19's origin, scale, government response, prevention and treatment. Each product was designed to be tailored with local government websites and logos. https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/SLTTCOVIDToolkit_FINAL_508.pdf
Center for Disease Control's: **Social Media Toolkit**	Using social media tools has become an effective way to expand reach, foster engagement and increase access to credible, science-based health messages. This resource provides an overview of social media features, strategies, and an evaluation worksheet to promote best practices in digital messaging. https://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit_bm.pdf
The Department of Education's **Teaching Skills that Matter: Digital Literacy**	The Department of Education's Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) hosts a suite of resources on digital literacy to include best practices, lesson plans on social media and workplace safety, and project- and problem-based learning templates. https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/teaching-skills-matter-adult-education/digital-literacy
DHS Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA): **"Think Before You Link"**	This resource recognizes that memes and headlines on social media can provoke passionate responses and provides guidance on how to reevaluate before sharing potentially harmful or misleading content. https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_1115_cisa_nrmc-Think-Before-You-Link_1.pdf
DHS Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA): **"Resilience Series Graphic Novels"**	First in the series, Real Fake demonstrates how threat actors capitalize on political and social issues (especially around election cycles) to stealthily plant doubt in the minds of targeted audiences and steer their opinion. https://www.cisa.gov/cfi-resilience-series-graphic-novels

The following sources are provided for informational purposes only as examples of digital literacy information that colleges and universities may also provide. There may be comparable information and resources offered by your local or state college or university.

Stanford University's "Civic Online Reasoning"	The Civic Online Reasoning (COR) curriculum provides free lesson plans and assessments to help teach students how to effectively evaluate online information. https://cor.stanford.edu/
American University's Building Resilience & Confronting Risk in the COVID-19 Era: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization	This comprehensive guide for parents and caregivers teaches readers what online radicalization is, how to recognize warning signs that a child may have been exposed to harmful content, how to engage with children and mitigate online risks, and where to find additional help.https://www.american.edu/centers/university-excellence/upload/splc_peril_covid_parents_guide_jan_2021_1-2.pdf

Additional Sources: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ia/ia_combatting-targeted-disinformation-campaigns.pdf