

Tips for Teaching Media Literacy in a Distance Learning Classroom



Report by



Introduction

What is media literacy?



MEDIA LITERACY IS “THE ABILITY TO ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE, CREATE, AND ACT USING ALL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION.”

According to the [National Association for Media Literacy Education \(NAMLE\)](#), media literacy is “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.” Media literacy is crucial for understanding how information and messages are transmitted to us through written, audio, and visual formats, as well as how we transmit information to others.

Media literacy also encompasses the ability to detect bias, disinformation, and misinformation in the media we consume – and to effectively use media to design and distribute our own messages. Ultimately, media literacy is meant to foster critical thinking skills and responsible digital citizenship.

Introduction

Why does media literacy matter for children?



ONLY 44% OF CHILDREN AGED 10 TO 18 FEEL THAT THEY CAN TELL FAKE NEWS STORIES FROM REAL ONES.

It is never too early to teach media literacy. In fact, neglecting media literacy skill-building can leave students at risk of falling victim to disinformation and “fake news,” especially online. According to research from [Common Sense Media](#), only 44% of children aged 10 to 18 feel that they can tell fake news stories from real stories. In the same survey, 31% of kids who shared a news story online over a 6-month period later found out it was inaccurate.

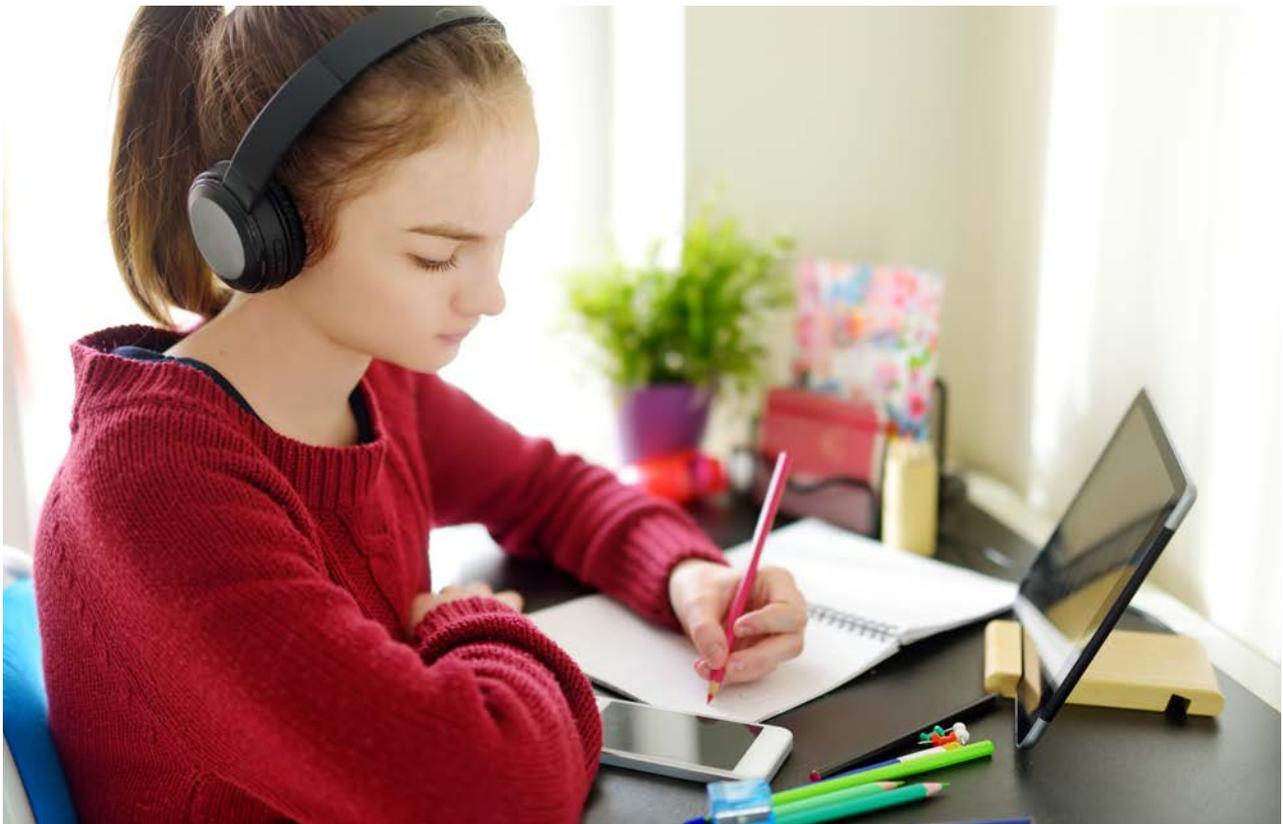
Similarly, a 2016 study from [Stanford University](#) found that more than 80% of middle school students cannot tell the difference between a news story on a website and an advertisement labeled sponsored content. With the constant barrage of information from TV, social media, advertisements, news, and other channels, students must be equipped with the skills to navigate a confusing and polarized media landscape.

Introduction

How can media literacy be taught in distance and hybrid learning?

With many students attending school from home and relying even more on technology to learn, media literacy is more important than ever. Students need to be able to distinguish between fact and fiction, as well as understand how to identify sources and their credibility when they encounter new information while learning remotely. At-home learning brings its own pedagogical challenges, but it also presents an opportunity to further integrate media literacy into the curriculum.

[News-O-Matic](#), an educational resource that publishes nonfiction stories for grades K-8, has teamed up with the [National Association for Media Literacy Education \(NAMLE\)](#) to offer six recommendations for educators to promote media literacy. The list of tips and resources below has also been reviewed by multiple educators. Whether you are teaching fully remote students, teaching face-to-face, or in a hybrid learning environment, these media literacy education tips allow for a seamless transition across teaching formats.





6 Tips for Teaching
Media Literacy in a
Remote Learning
Classroom

Tip #1:

Incorporate various forms of media into instruction and learning activities.

Becoming media-literate involves understanding how to interpret many different forms of communication, including texts, graphs, charts, infographics, photos, videos, and audio recordings. Using multiple forms of media in your lessons can help students develop their skills in accessing, analyzing, and evaluating new information.

For example, a science or math lesson might include sharing an infographic or chart with a misleading scale and asking students to explain why it is misleading. For a social studies lesson, teachers might share news articles that cover a variety of perspectives on a topic and then ask students to write on the class discussion board about how the same topic or event can be described in so many different ways, drawing attention to each source's bias and purpose. For synchronous online sessions, ELA teachers sharing lessons about main idea or persuasion might consider highlighting a popular advertisement with students and having a discussion about the techniques that advertisers use to convince viewers to buy their product.



Teachers at all grade levels can discuss product placement in movies, games, and social media with students. Influencers on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok earn millions of dollars in advertising revenue today, and many target young students. Helping students become more aware of how and why these products are shared and promoted by media creators can help develop both critical thinking skills and media savvy.

Tip #2:

Integrate age-appropriate news sources and news-related lessons into the curriculum.

The internet is full of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, especially when it comes to the news. This content may be accidentally or intentionally misleading, for different reasons. Students can benefit from teachers' guidance in learning how to identify the qualities of reputable news resources. Using a combination of skills-based lesson plans and age-appropriate current events content can foster greater student interest in the news and teach students how to recognize credible sources.

Having established, trusted news sources that can be used in the classroom is an ideal way to teach critical thinking and media literacy skills. For example, [News-O-Matic](#) publishes daily news articles specifically for children, at a variety of reading levels. All articles are vetted by an on-staff child psychologist to help students understand the news in an unbiased way and at a developmentally appropriate level. For older students, another useful resource for finding trusted news sources is the News Literacy Project's [Checkology](#) tool, which teaches skills such as how to identify credible information and distinguish fact from fiction when evaluating new media.

In addition, nonprofit organizations such as the [National Association for Media Literacy Education \(NAMLE\)](#), [the News Literacy Project](#), and [Common Sense Media](#), offer news-related lesson plans, videos, quizzes, and other resources that can be used in an in-person, hybrid, or remote learning environment. [All of NAMLE's 75+ organizational partners](#) as well as the [National Media Literacy Alliance](#) provide resources and materials for teachers and students.

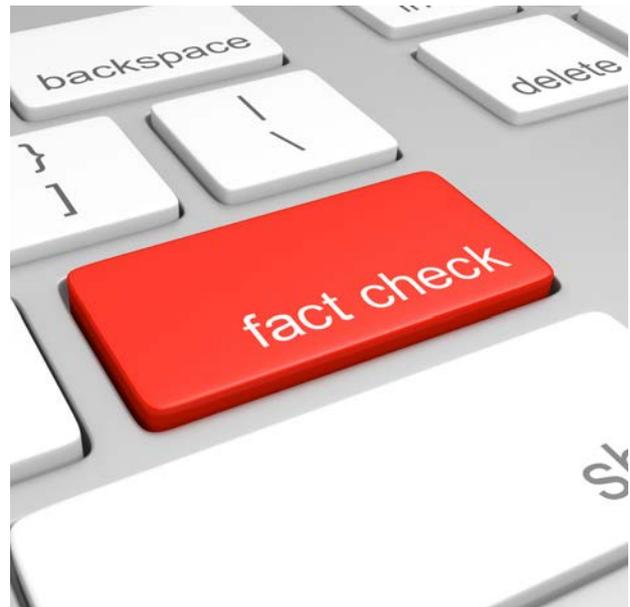
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Tip #3:

Teach students to identify facts and evidence in the media they consume.

The ability to identify facts and evidence is a key part of analyzing and evaluating media. Credible media sources should have plenty of evidence to back up any claims. Evidence could include statements from experts like scientists, statistics from official groups like the U.S. Census Bureau, or photos and videos that provide tangible evidence of an event. If there's no proof, the media students are reading or watching may be presenting opinions (or even false information). They may not be objective sources.

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Within a remote/hybrid learning environment, teachers can incorporate activities that enable students to do a close read (or watch) of media and find evidence that supports facts. For example, teachers can share several (pre-selected) news articles and videos related to a topic. Using a collaborative workspace like breakout rooms, teachers can ask students to work together to identify the language, statistics, or research that represents the evidence used in the media to evaluate the texts' credibility. For schools that follow Common Core, these skills also correspond with standards related to citing specific textual evidence and summarizing key supporting details and ideas.

Tip #4:

Teach students the importance of understanding the author's purpose.

Students are already spending a lot of time online. Whenever they read the news online or see a post on social media, they should always try to understand whom that information came from and the purpose for which it was created. It helps to ask questions like: Who made this, and why? Was it shared to get clicks? Was it created to get views for advertising revenue? Was it made to spread a piece of misinformation or advance a political agenda? Helping students ask a variety of questions about the media they choose to consume is vital for developing media literacy skills.

Some of the teacher reviewers for this guide also recommended the thinking routine “See, Think, Wonder,” featured in [Harvard’s Project Zero](#) professional development program for educators. This can be useful in helping students process and think more deeply about different types of media. While it is simple, it helps both teachers and students notice details about a particular media artifact and separate their observations from their questions.

Lessons about the author’s purpose can also be integrated into any grade level’s ELA or media literacy curriculum. One activity involves teaching students about the three different types of writing purposes: to persuade, inform, or entertain. After discussing these three purposes, teachers can share (pre-selected) media examples with students and discuss as a class how the media fit into one or more of those categories. Again, the “See, Think, Wonder” thinking routine can be helpful to launch and organize these discussions and further inquiry.

**TEACH THE THREE
DIFFERENT TYPES OF
AUTHOR'S PURPOSE:
PERSUADE, INFORM,
OR ENTERTAIN.**

Tip #5:

Gamify activities that separate fact from fiction.

To help students further develop their skills in analyzing and evaluating media, introduce activities that put their theoretical knowledge into practice. Turning media literacy into a game can also help students feel more engaged, especially during distance learning.

One lesson activity is to play a variation of the game “Two Truths and a Lie,” in which the teacher shares three “news” stories and asks students to identify which one is false. For remote and hybrid instruction, teachers can create a poll in their learning management system for students to vote on which story they think is false. Ask them how they arrived at their conclusion, and use this as an entry point to explore deeper media literacy concepts like bias and representation.

With high school and older students, some teacher reviewers recommended using the website [“Spot the Troll”](#) to identify how bot and fake accounts are used on social media to pollute our information landscape and mislead real human beings.



TURNING MEDIA LITERACY INTO A GAME CAN ALSO HELP STUDENTS FEEL MORE ENGAGED, ESPECIALLY DURING DISTANCE LEARNING.

Tip #6:

Challenge students to CREATE media projects reflecting their understanding.



The final components of media literacy — create and act — are about teaching students how to develop media on their own in a thoughtful, responsible manner. Projects provide the perfect culmination for a media literacy unit and encourage students to be creative while applying the skills they have learned.

Elementary students may want to write a short article about a topic, either individually or collaboratively. Then, they can discuss how they integrated sources and explain why each source was a fact-based piece that others should trust.

Middle-grade students can experiment with creating an advertisement, such as a poster or a video, for a hypothetical product they create. Using Google Slides, Adobe Spark Post, or Canva, students can create collages of text and images for these advertisements.

For middle or high school students, drafting full newspaper articles or creating a podcast are perfect opportunities to get hands-on practice in developing news stories and sharing content responsibly in a digital format. Ask students to cite their sources, and encourage peer review for fact-checking.

For more media literacy resources:



News-O-Matic engages students with interactive, daily nonfiction articles with a focus on ELA, science, social studies, and SEL. With 10,000+ multimedia-rich, leveled texts for elementary and middle school, News-O-Matic makes nonfiction accessible for all readers. Thousands of schools incorporate News-O-Matic articles into their ELA, media literacy, and social studies curricula.

News-O-Matic has more than 5 million downloads from the App Store in 148 countries. It has also been recognized as a 2020 Teachers' Choice Award Winner. News-O-Matic is available on the web, in the App Store, and on Google Play.

www.newsomatic.org



The National Association for Media Literacy Education is a national non-profit organization dedicated to media literacy as a basic life skill for the 21st century. The NAMLE vision is to help individuals of all ages develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective communicators, and active citizens in today's world. NAMLE membership for individuals is FREE. Sponsorships and organizational partnerships are welcomed at namle.net, and donations to support NAMLE's efforts to improve media literacy education can be made there also.

www.namle.net