



MEDIA LITERACY

Principle (3)(a): All individuals have a duty to educate themselves about the actions of government officials and current events in the world, taking care to ascertain facts from reliable sources of information.

D&C 88:78–81, 118

>>>> GOALS

- Commit to learn more about government action, current events, and what constitutes ethical government.
- Develop skills to identify reputable news sources and think critically about the information they present.

>>>> SCRIPTURE STUDY

“[S]eek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”
D&C 88:118

“For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.”
Moroni 7:15

As members of MWEG, our goal is to courageously advocate for ethical government, and in order to do that we need to be informed on what our government is doing and determine whether we agree with what it does. In fact, we often do more harm than good when we speak either for or against government action that we know very little about. We don’t have to wait to advocate until we know everything, but we must be willing to become educated on issues and processes first, and that includes getting better at finding reliable news sources.

Here are some simple ways to start:

1. Learn more about local, state, and national candidates. Vote for the candidate, not the party.
2. Pay attention to news about issues that concern you.
3. Develop a routine of checking reliable news sources regularly.
4. Spend time researching, learning, and discussing what ethical government means to you.

As we work to expand our knowledge of the world around us, we must also hone our ability to discern between good and bad information. We can know the truth and learn to be careful judges, as Jesus Christ has advised us (John 8:31–32; JST, Matthew 7:1–2). This advice is particularly relevant to news consumption today since we live in an age where disinformation is becoming more and more widespread. As we seek to make our world a more ethical place, it is therefore increasingly important to know how to distinguish which news sites are reputable and which viewpoints they represent in order to “seek diligently” to learn from the “best books,” including newspapers, websites, etc. (D&C 109:7).



Three Ways to Improve Your Media Literacy

Just like academic research or even general conference talks cite many different sources, look to multiple sources on the same topic to get a broader view of an issue. Then, follow these three steps to analyze individual news pieces:

1

CHECK THE FACTS AGAINST OTHER REPUTABLE SITES

If you feel yourself questioning the facts of a story or just want to verify whether the news is true, do a simple internet search to see if other sites are reporting something similar. You can check reputable fact-checking websites, such as FactCheck.org or PolitiFact.org. This is especially important if an article is making a claim that seems dubious or surprising. If the news is breaking and there aren't any fact checks yet available, consider waiting a few hours before sharing it until other news sources have had the chance to verify the information. Sometimes as the news unfolds and reporters are able to gather more information, the facts are clarified or even change altogether.

2

LOOK TO THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION

Many news sites do not use original reporting for all of their stories, or they may reference reporting published on another website. For example, the story may say, "According to the New York Times..." If this is the case, go directly to the New York Times to see what the original story said. Other stories might offer links to primary source documents and interviews, such as a legal document, a government report, a television interview, or a public hearing. In these cases, you can verify the information by checking these primary source documents as well.

3

RESEARCH THE NEWS WEBSITE OR SOURCE ITSELF

Consider researching the website you are using as a source, especially an unfamiliar one. Do a quick search about the site to get some background on the kind of information it provides. How long has it been established? Has it won any awards? Does it use its own reporters? Check out MWEG's "Media Literacy: Evaluating News Sources," on our website, for five questions to verify reputable media sources. Taking the time to research your usual news media sources can help give you peace of mind (or raise red flags).

(Suggestions adapted from The Observer: "How 'News Literacy' Gets Web Misinformation Wrong" by Mike Caulfield.)



>>>> LEARN MORE

Media Bias & Ethical Standards

Ad Fontes Media

offers an interactive media bias chart that plots news sources according to political bias and reliability.

AllSides.com

rates media sources based on whether they are left, center, or right. It also curates news and allows readers to evaluate major news stories from sources ranked right, center, and left in a side-by-side format.

Look for this banner on other MWEg materials to learn more about the importance of media literacy.



Fact-Checking

The Associated Press

*maintains a page called **Not Real News**, which it updates weekly to show the most popular but untrue stories of the week.*

FactCheck.org

is a political fact-checking website created as a nonpartisan, nonprofit resource for voters. It is run by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

PolitiFact.org

is a news fact-checking website owned by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Its journalists check news stories and politicians' statements and rate them on the "Truth-o-Meter."

Educational Resources

CallingBull.org

is the website for a college course designed by professors at the University of Washington to teach media consumers how to recognize false information. They share the course resources freely online.

CommonSense.org

offers resources and educational materials for students, parents, and educators looking to make appropriate media choices. They also offer lesson plans for educators, including some on fake news.

Newseum EdCollections

provides free educational materials on media literacy designed with teachers and educators in mind. Sign up for a free account to access the materials.

Stanford History Education Group

hosts a Civic Online Reasoning course that teaches how to critically evaluate information.

Fighting Disinformation Online maintains an updated list of tools and resources for fighting disinformation, courtesy of the RAND Corporation.



>>>> IDEAS FOR TEACHING CHILDREN

- **Play the game of telephone.** *Someone makes up a story and whispers it in the ear of the person next to them. That person then relays the story to the next person in line. Keep passing the story until everyone has heard. What would happen if the only version of the story you heard was from the last person in line? What facts would you get wrong? What facts would you miss? Why is it important to get information from reliable sources?*
- **Gather several newspapers and highlighters.** *Try to find examples of news stories about topics listed in this scripture: "[T]hings both in heaven and in the earth; and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms" (D&C 88:79). For example, for "things in heaven," you could highlight articles about airplanes, space, or birds. For "judgments which are on the land," you could highlight articles about court decisions.*
- **Talk about different ways you can get information.** *List as many sources of information as you can. Talk about which ones are the most reliable.*

>>>> THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- How do we balance the need to be informed with the stress of our daily lives? How does staying informed fit with our lifestyle?
- What is cognitive bias, and how can we avoid it when evaluating news stories and media?
- When discussing news and current events with others, how can we foster productive discussions and steer the conversation away from cognitive bias?
- What can news sites do to become more reputable to readers?
- What can consumers do to help prevent the spread of disinformation?

>>>> TAKE ACTION

- Discuss this sub-principle with MWEG's Facebook discussion group or host or attend an MWEG chapter meeting on media literacy.
- Plan a "Family Home Evening" with your family or friends using some of the ideas suggested here.
- Host an MWEG Neighborhood Informational Meeting (NIM) to discuss these ideas with neighbors and friends.
- Use the three ways to improve your media literacy on page 2 to evaluate a news source you commonly use.
- Pick a few of the resources listed on page 3 and explore what they have to offer.
- Consider participating in an online class that teaches how to recognize media bias or fake news; see page 3 for some recommendations.

MORMON WOMEN FOR ETHICAL GOVERNMENT

MWEG is an organization dedicated to inspiring women of faith to be ambassadors of peace who transcend partisanship and courageously advocate for ethical government.