

6 Mediactive principles for news consumers

1. BE SKEPTICAL.

Even trustworthy media organizations make mistakes, and social media isn't known for its credibility. So we must start with skepticism – **about everything**. This caution applies to every scrap of news and information that comes our way, including from online, print and TV news organizations, social media posts, emails and texts.

2. EXERCISE JUDGMENT.

Not believing in anything can be as dangerous as being too trusting. We need to apply sound judgment. Let's bring due diligence to what we read, watch and hear.

Fortunately, there are smart, proven ways to sort things out:

- **Don't rely on any single source of info** – even the trusted ones. Find multiples.
- **Go to original sources**. When looking for official information, go straight to the data source. For health information, this might be the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Verify claims using a method like SIFT**, a technique we love from Mike Caulfield at Washington State University Vancouver. SIFT stands for **stop, investigate** the source, **find** better coverage, and **trace** claims back to their original context.

3. OPEN YOUR MIND.

To be well informed, we need to seek out and pay attention to information sources that will offer new perspectives and challenge our own assumptions, rather than simply reinforcing them. **Go outside your comfort zone by talking to people whose opinions differ from yours**. A little change at a time can make a big difference – you'll never know everything, and certainly not at once.

Here are some of our favorite outlets to look to for new perspectives:

- Global Voices Online
- The Root
- Indian Country Today
- The Marshall Project
- STAT
- Word in Black
- Science News

6 Mediactive principles for news consumers

4. KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS.

This principle goes by many names: research, reporting, homework. The more important you consider a topic, the more essential it is to follow up on media reports about it. **No single article or video tells the whole story.** If you have questions, try to find answers in others' coverage. If the topic is close to home, ask questions directly.

Most of us already know that we need to ask questions. But do we know why? If we're actively challenging the narratives around us and engaging our minds, we are far less prone to accepting misinformation when it's offered – and it will always be offered.

5. LEARN MEDIA TECHNIQUES.

We are all media creators to some degree, as we post on social media, share photos and videos, write reviews and more. We need to understand how people and organizations use media to inform, influence and even manipulate the rest of us.

There's no one right way to learn media techniques, but here are a few ways to get started:

- **Observe** the corners of the internet you frequent, and ask yourself questions about the people involved and the content they post.
- **Examine** advertisements and marketing schemes. How are they using media to get you to purchase their products and ideas?
- **Talk** to people outside your age demographic about what media they use and why.

6. CONSUME SLOW NEWS.

What is slow news? It's the idea that you should take a breath before believing – and especially before sharing – breaking news (and most non-breaking news). **Wait for confirmation from trustworthy sources.** Understand that what we think we know right now can be, and often is, either incorrect or incomplete.