Media Skills: Crash Course Media Literacy #11

Crash Course: Media Literacy
https://youtube.com/watch?v=Be-A-sCIMpg
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/Be-A-sCIMpg

If you've ever driven a car – legally, that is – you know before you taste that sweet, sweet vehicular freedom you had to take a really fun test.

No, not the practical one where you parallel park between two cones like your life depends on it. The learner's permit exam, the test of all tests.

You probably studied for it with a real snooze-worthy booklet or some informational government website. You had to learn all the rules of the road before getting to touch the road. Well, in a car at least.

Whenever you're learning a new skill, there's a certain amount of theoretical knowledge you need before you're ready to sit in "the driver's seat." It's the same for media literacy. These days we're so inundated with media it's impossible to teach someone all the skills they need. It's like we skipped the driving exam and woke up behind the wheel of a moving race car!

Luckily, it's never too late to dust off the ol' driver's manual. So far on Crash Course Media Literacy, we've covered everything from how literacy was born to how our brains handle messages. We've talked about theories and principles, but now it's time to really get behind the wheel. [Theme Music] In our first episode we discussed the National Association of Media Literacy Educators' definition: "The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication." These five skills are your toolbox encountering media in the wild.

If you're watching this video, you may take the first skill, access, for granted. To play this YouTube video you need a device that can connect to the internet – a smartphone, computer, or a tablet. Plus, that device needs software for video and audio playback.

Then of course you need an internet connection, one fast enough to stream this video. To some of us, being constantly connected to the internet is an everyday thing. But these things cost money, and in the U.

S., many people can't access the internet. At least 5 million kids don't have internet access at home and for many poor families, places like the local library or a McDonald's with free wifi are the only places they can get online. Think about how often you use the internet, and for what.

You have probably used it to complete homework or apply for a job or file taxes. All of these things seem essential and easy to do – if you have the means. Practice makes perfect, right?

A kid who grows up without regular internet access will have lower digital skill levels than their peers who access it easily. And, as I'm sure you know, digital skills are crucial to functioning in our high-tech world. That means many people who don't have this access are behind before they even start school.

In July 2016, the United Nations declared internet access a basic human right. They said, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." The internet may seem like it makes everything way more accessible. You can just Google what you need rather than lug around a set of encyclopedias.

But access remains unevenly distributed. The other side of the coin is our second skill, analyze. If and when you do have access, you're flooded with way too much information and way too many sources of entertainment.

Locating the highest quality content – whether you're looking for a reliable source of news or a TV show you like, or a series of charming and educational YouTube videos – this requires you to analyze what you're looking at. The foundation of media analysis is acknowledging that all media is constructed with a purpose and a particular point of view. Media literacy scholar Renee Hobbs recommends answering five questions when you make a media choice, Number 1: Who created this message and what is the purpose?

Is it a movie made by Disney for entertainment? Is it an ad made by Apple to sell phones and computers? Number 2: What techniques does it use to attract and hold attention?

Does the message include persuasive elements to convince you its story is true? Is it flashy and loud like a pop-up ad, or have a cliffhanger-y headline to suck you in? Number 3: What lifestyles, values and points of view does it depict?

Is it representing a single point of view, like an autobiography? Is it an Instagram feed that's all about that hashtag beach life or a blog that's all about working hard and playing hard? Number 4: How might different people interpret this message?

Would your parents or grandparents or best friend feel the same way about this? How would they react? Number 5: What is omitted, or left out?

Is this article about politics talking about every party or just one? Did that break-up song mention the good times, too? Why or why not?

Once you've established answers to these questions, it's time to evaluate the quality and credibility of the media you're consuming. Media literacy scholar Julie Coiro says there are four key things to look out for: relevance, accuracy, bias, and reliability. The first is relevance.

Does the info or media serve its purpose, and to what degree? If you Googled "recipes for chow mein" and recipe for peach muffins comes up instead, that content is not relevant. This one can be a pretty low bar to clear.

As we know, our mind loves to accept the easiest to understand info as the right info, because it's convenient. Which is why we move on to…accuracy. Evaluating something for accuracy can be difficult when you're just learning about it yourself.

The first step is to check how factual it is. Are its claims backed up by empirical evidence or is it just someone's opinion? You should be able to double check those facts with other sources.

Of course, just because multiple outlets tell the same story doesn't mean it's true. Like how every time there's a hurricane, someone photoshops a shark into the waters and local news stations run the story. In cases like these, take that info and double check with their source.

Next, you look for bias, or someone's perspective. Be sure to distinguish whether the author of the media you're evaluating is slanting the facts towards a particular point of view, and ask how that reflects on the publisher. Biased media can obscure reality by presenting only the evidence that supports one opinion.

To ward this off, it's always great to seek out diverse perspectives on a topic and look for evidence to support any stance that you take. Finally, determining reliability can help you find sources of information that you trust. Reliability is how trustworthy a publisher or author is based on the entirety of their work.

Yes, it's complicated. As you know, some respected publishers who are reliable sources publish native ads that look like news. Some even promote those sketchy click-bait tabloid ads about celebrities dying or losing weight.

By consistently evaluating for relevance, accuracy, and bias, you can determine whether a publisher's work is reliable on the whole. Let's take this four-part evaluation for a spin in the Thought Bubble! Consider this article from The Washington Post, from November 2017.

The headline reads: FCC net neutrality process 'corrupted' by fake comments and vanishing consumer complaints, officials say. It's about a new rule the Federal Communications Commission was set to vote on the next month. The FCC put out a call for citizens to comment on the decision to roll back net neutrality protections.

Some said the comment process wasn't fair and that bad actors manipulated it to get their way. So, is this relevant? Well if you came across this article because you were searching for Titanic fanfic, you'd say no.

But if you came across it on social media and were interested in this net neutrality battle, you'd certainly find its information relevant. Check. Is it accurate?

The Washington Post's reporter explains the net neutrality comments process and the allegations against it. They cite credible sources along the way, like the New York Attorney General, an FCC spokesperson, and a data scientist. They also link to other stories that back up their claims throughout.

It looks pretty accurate. Check. Is it biased?

This article doesn't just quote the FCC in this story about the FCC. They also gave space to the New York Attorney General and the leader of an advocacy group that are against the FCC's net neutrality decision. They present both sides of this fight, and include a third party, the data scientist, to offer a neutral opinion.

That's a good way to fight off bias. Check. Is it reliable?

The Washington Post is well-known for a history of quality journalism and has won dozens of Pulitzer Prizes (the Oscars for journalism). The article was written by Brian Fung, their technology writer who has written about internet access quite a bit before. He's also written for the National Journal and The Atlantic, two other reliable publications.

This checks out for reliability. See, it only takes a minute to go through this four-step check with a bit of news. You can use this whenever you come across media you find questionable.

It's an important skill to have. Thanks Thought Bubble! Maybe the most fun media literacy skill is to create media yourself.

Taking your knowledge of how media are produced and producing some of your own is actually a great way to develop skills in analyzing and evaluating media, too. It's like media literacy inception. But you don't have to be some music producer or artist to create media.

Posting to social networks is creating media. Writing a blog is creating media. Making a funny GIF from your favorite TV show is creating media.

Finally, the most important part of media literacy is being able to act on all of the skills you've acquired. Acting on media literacy could mean looking up local candidates for government and using that info when you vote. It could mean going vegan after reading about animal farms.

It could even mean deleting Twitter from your phone after realizing you're addicted to social media. You may be wondering: do everyday people really access, analyze, evaluate, create and act on all the media they consume each day? Of course not.

It's impossible to apply each of these principles to everything we absorb all the time. But little by little as you start to apply them to different media it will become a habit. Like building a muscle, you'll find yourself doing it reflexively as you scroll through your phone or listen to the radio.

And as a key tenet of media literacy, you should be able to accomplish this across all of your devices and types of media. Not just the news and advertisements, but movies and music and books, too. You might use multiple devices in the span of one day and, in that one day see videos, photos, news articles, ads, short stories, quizzes, sponsored content – you name it.

As long as you know how to access what you want, what to trust, and who you can rely on for it, you'll thrive within the fast-paced media environment. But we're not done yet. Next time on Crash Course Media Literacy we're going to talk about how media literacy itself is going to change in the future.

How will we respond to virtual and augmented reality media? How does artificial intelligence factor into our news diet? Should we even let corporations sell us "smart home" devices that listen to us all the time?

There's a lot to cover, and I can't wait to dive in. For Crash Course, I'm Jay Smooth. See you next time!

Crash Course Media Literacy is filmed in the Dr. Cheryl C. Kinney Studio in Missoula, MT.

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