

Peacemaking Through Media Literacy

We are commanded to seek after learning and truth. Understanding and accepting truth, even in secular settings, is an important part of peacemaking. Knowing how to access and decipher accurate information can bring personal peace. Expanding our knowledge allows us to build peace in our communities as we grow more informed about important issues, advocate for those in need, and encourage those in power to do the same. Media literacy skills are peacemaking skills.

True peace can never exist on a foundation of deception or falsehood. Lies and conspiracies are frequently used to foment contention and violence. Sincere peacemakers are honest in their words, deeds, and actions, and they maintain this standard when sharing information.



SECTION I

Gospel Foundation

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

“Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly . . . Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; . . . things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms— That ye may be prepared in all things.” (Doctrine & Covenants 88:78-80)

“[S]eek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” (Doctrine & Covenants 88:118)

“And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” (Doctrine & Covenants 93:24)

“If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” (Articles of Faith 1:13)

“For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge . . . Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil.” (Moroni 7:15, 19)

“The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.” (Doctrine & Covenants 93:36)

“Because of our sacred regard for each human intellect, we consider the obtaining of an education to be a religious responsibility. . . . Our Creator expects His children everywhere to educate themselves.” (Russell M. Nelson, “Where is Wisdom,” Ensign, October 1992)

“More and more people are not reading the news of the world around them or about the important issues of the day. They apparently rely on what others tell them or on the sound bites of television news, where even the most significant subjects rarely get more than 60 seconds. Where will this lead? It is leading us to a less concerned, less thoughtful, and less informed citizenry, and that results in less responsive and less responsible government.” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Where Will It Lead?” [Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 9, 2004], speeches.byu.edu).

The Church’s handbook tells us to seek information from reliable sources: “In today’s world, information is easy to access and share. This can be a great blessing for those seeking to be educated and informed. However, many sources of information are unreliable and do not edify. Some sources seek to promote anger, contention, fear, or baseless conspiracy theories (see 3 Nephi 11:30; Mosiah 2:32). Therefore, it is important that Church members be wise as they seek truth. Members of the Church should seek out and share only credible, reliable, and factual sources of information.” (General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 38.8.41, ChurchofJesusChrist.org)



What is Media Literacy?

“Good inspiration is based upon good information.”

—Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” Ensign, April 2018

Developing and using media literacy skills can allow us to:

- Determine if the information we encounter is credible and if the source is trustworthy.
- Understand the standards of good journalism and research and choose sources accordingly.
- Exercise healthy skepticism and develop good judgment on which information should be shared.
- Protect institutions, groups, and individuals who would be harmed by conspiracies or lies.

The Center for Media Literacy defines media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms.”

This could include print, television, internet, radio, podcasts, social media, and any other medium from which information is disseminated.

TERMS TO KNOW

Mass media Includes any means of mass communication, including in print, broadcast, or online.

Digital media Any information shared through a computer, smartphone, or tablet. More than 80 percent of Americans get their information from their smartphones “sometimes” or “often,” according to the Pew Research Center.

Objectivity Fairness, honesty, and accuracy. Objective reporting tells the facts.

Bias An often unconscious tendency to prejudge people, topics, or events in ways that correspond with our personal opinions and worldviews. Biased reporting tells the facts from an established perspective.

Misinformation Information that misleads regardless of the intent of the creator. Misinformation is prolific in the internet age and often shared without malice.

Disinformation Information created with the intent to mislead. Details and information can be added to or deleted from a story in order to confuse, cause outrage, or promote an agenda.

Conspiracy theory Attributing a tragedy or difficult-to-explain event to a secret plot carried out by an influential group of people. Conspiracy theories grow out of humans’ natural tendencies to try to explain the unexplainable.

Loaded language The use of emotionally charged language, often to influence the reader or audience. The use of loaded language can indicate bias.

Speculation A conclusion reached without adequate information to back it up. Some opinion writers make claims without providing actual evidence of the claim.

Sensationalism The use of shocking language to draw attention to a story. In digital media, this is commonly seen in the form of clickbait, which are headlines and links that appeal to a reader’s curiosity.

Influencer A person who has sway over a target audience, typically on social media.



Media Literacy Tips

1

Proactively consume information from a variety of news sources and perspectives.

Look for reliable sources.

- Media bias charts like the ones created by Ad Fontes Media rate news sources on both their political bias and reliability.
- Investigate whether your media goes through an editing or review process before publication. Are they presenting original information or repackaging content from other sources?

Diversify your media diet.

- Look for reliable sources that offer perspectives from varying political views and demographics.
- Vary your mediums of consumption — for example, listen to some podcasts in addition to social media platforms.

3

Watch for signs of bias in the information you consume and create.

All humans — including journalists, researchers, writers, and influencers — have biases.

You can identify journalists who try to combat their biases.

- Stories are presented objectively.
- They consult experts and offer multiple points of view.

Some media outlets and social media accounts show extreme bias by:

- Distorting facts.
- Offering limited points of view.
- Using polarizing language.

Avoid consuming or creating media that uses exaggeration, objectification, an “us vs. them” narrative, false equivalence, name-calling, or encouragements of violence.

“If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things — that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.

— Doctrine & Covenants 42:61

2

Use the SIFT method before you share information.

Stop. Don't share the story until you have done more research.

Investigate the source. Identify the author, publication, and type of story (opinion, news, analysis, etc.). Where does the source fall on the spectrum of reliability and bias?

Find better coverage. Is there a more reliable source for this information? What are other sources saying about this topic?

Trace claims to their original source, especially in the case of visual media. Use Google to search for images and videos.

4

Give feedback to media creators who promote messages of misinformation, division, or hate.

Be respectful when offering feedback or correcting misinformation shared by people you know.

- Remember to address ideas; don't attack people.
- If you choose to confront people who share misinformation, do so from a place of love and curiosity.
- Take conversations offline if necessary.
- Remember that minds cannot be changed through arguing, humiliation, or name calling.

If you feel a story, media organization, or social media account is showing bias or missing an important perspective, contact them about it directly.

- Ask about their publication standards; in the case of professional news outlets, these standards should include their policies on sourcing and editing stories and offering corrections.
- Consider writing a letter to the editor or a longer op-ed to share your point of view.
- On social media accounts, send a direct message or offer respectful feedback in the comments section.



For Discussion and Self-Reflection

As you strive to be a better peacemaker, ask yourself these questions about your media consumption and creation:

- Do the messages I consume and create encourage unity or division?
- Do my media sources help me understand existing injustices and bear witness of suffering?
- Does the media I consume dehumanize people?
- Do the messages I see and create fuel love or hate?
- Do I actively seek out perspectives that differ from my own?
- Do I keep an open mind and try to be aware of how my personal biases may interfere with my understanding of new information?
- Do I ultimately feel hopeful that I can build a more just and peaceful world?

If the media you consume does not coincide with principles of peacemaking, consider what steps you can take to change.

If you feel strongly about an issue you learn about in the media, consider what steps you can take to get involved with that issue in your community. Even small actions create positive peace. Opportunities could include:

- Writing to your local, state, or national representatives.
- Publishing a letter to the editor.
- Volunteering at a nonprofit organization.
- Speaking at a school board meeting.
- Donating money or supplies to people in need.
- Running for political office.

Ultimately, personal peace as well as societal peace comes from the Prince of Peace. As His followers, we can do much to share His light and His peace with others. We can be instrumental in creating a peaceful society. We can learn to be peacemakers in part by consuming better media. As you strive to refine your media literacy skills, your capacity for peacemaking will increase.

“Let us as a people become a true light on the hill — a light that ‘cannot be hid.’ Let us show that there is a peaceful, respectful way to resolve complex issues and an enlightened way to work out disagreements. As you demonstrate the charity that true followers of Jesus Christ manifest, the Lord will magnify your efforts beyond your loftiest imagination.”

— Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, April 2023

“It is so important that you young men and you young women get all of the education that you can. The Lord has said very plainly that His people are to gain knowledge of countries and kingdoms and of things of the world through the process of education, even by study and by faith. Education is the key which will unlock the door of opportunity for you. It is worth sacrificing for. It is worth working at, and if you educate your mind and your hands, you will be able to make a great contribution to the society of which you are a part, and you will be able to reflect honorably on the Church of which you are a member. My dear young brothers and sisters, take advantage of every educational opportunity that you can possibly afford.”

— Gordon B. Hinckley, “Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, June 1999, 4



Scan the QR code

to visit the MWEG library for additional information and media literacy resources.

Additional Resources

- News Literacy Project | newslit.org
- Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart | adfontesmedia.com
- AllSides | allsides.com
- Common Sense Media | commonsensemedia.org
- MediaWise | poynter.org/mediawise