

# E.S.C.A.P.E. JUNK NEWS



6 WAYS TO EVALUATE INFORMATION

## E

### EVIDENCE

DO THE FACTS  
HOLD UP?

Look for information  
you can verify.

- Names
- Numbers
- Places
- Documents

## S

### SOURCE

WHO MADE  
THIS, AND CAN  
I TRUST THEM?

Trace who has  
touched the story.

- Authors
- Publishers
- Funders
- Aggregators
- Social media users

## C

### CONTEXT

WHAT'S THE  
BIG PICTURE?

Consider if this is the  
whole story and weigh other  
forces surrounding it.

- Current events
- Cultural trends
- Political goals
- Financial pressures

## A

### AUDIENCE

WHO IS THE  
INTENDED  
AUDIENCE?

Look for attempts to  
appeal to specific groups  
or types of people.

- Image choices
- Presentation techniques
- Language
- Content

## P

### PURPOSE

WHY WAS THIS  
MADE?

Look for clues to the  
motivation.

- The publisher's mission
- Persuasive language  
or images
- Moneymaking tactics
- Stated or unstated agendas
- Calls to action

## E

### EXECUTION

HOW IS THIS  
INFORMATION  
PRESENTED?

Consider how the way it's  
made affects the impact.

- Style
- Grammar
- Tone
- Image choices
- Placement and layout

**Don't give in to  
content  
overload.  
Fact-check  
before you  
react.**

**With the media swirl surrounding COVID-19,  
more commonly known as the Coronavirus, there  
is a lot of junk news in the information universe.  
Here are six quick and simple activities to help  
you quiet the chaos and find quality information.**

# EVIDENCE

## DO THE FACTS HOLD UP?

Look for information you can verify.

- Names
- Numbers
- Places
- Documents

With so much information being reported from around the world, it can be hard to know what to trust. When encountering new-to-you information compare the evidence to see if other sources are saying the same thing. Factual reports, whether in professional journalism or social media posts by well-meaning citizens, should share the same story.

How often in a developing situation should you check-in on the key facts of the event?

## Activity

Find three sources of information on **COVID-19**: a news source you already know and trust; a public health website; and a non-traditional source like an informational chart or special interest news site. Make a list of three to five facts about the current situation they all agree on.

Fact 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Fact 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Fact 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Fact 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Fact 5: \_\_\_\_\_





## SOURCE

**WHO MADE THIS, AND CAN I TRUST THEM?**

**Trace who has touched the story.**

- **Authors**
- **Publishers**
- **Funders**
- **Aggregators**
- **Social media users**

**An unusual situation can make it hard to know who to trust as experts and people around the world weigh in. It can be helpful during a chaotic situation to have information pass through a specialist like a journalist or educator to make complex information more easily accessible. As you explore different content, consider what makes a good source.**

**Who do you think is a good source of information on COVID-19?**

### **Activity**

**Pick one news item about COVID-19 and trace back who has touched the story. See if you can find the "about" page for the author or publisher. Check the publication history to see what other stories they have produced or shared.**

**If the author isn't an expert on the topic, look for things like:**

- **Official statements**
- **Studies and reports**
- **Interviews with witnesses**
- **Government statistics and data**

**Based on what you discover, do you think the source is trustworthy?**



## CONTEXT

### WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?

Consider if this is the whole story and weigh other forces surrounding it.

- Current Events
- Cultural Trends
- Political Goals
- Financial pressures

Since this is a developing situation, we may not see the complete story for months. However, even developing stories should give you as big a picture possible to help you get a sense of what is going on.

### Activity

Choose a news story about COVID-19. As you read the article, see if it answers all the iconic reporters' questions. Check off each question in the list below as you find the answers.

Who?

☐

What?

When?

☐

Where?

Why?

☐

How?

Did the article you chose provide enough context to give you the big picture? How many of these questions do you think an article can exclude answering before they don't provide enough context to be trustworthy?



# AUDIENCE

## WHO IS THE INTENDED AUDIENCE?

Look for attempts to appeal to specific groups or types of people.

- Image choices
- Presentation techniques
- Language
- Content

As we gather information, we need to consider news that focuses on different audiences. Does the national news need to cover your local emergency procedures? Consider who different publications cater to as their audiences and be wary of any media content that excludes certain groups or people. Watch out for content that is emotionally charged to target a specific audience or foster an “us versus them” situation.

During a public health situation, when is it useful to write to a specific audience? When does it make a story less trustworthy?

## Activity

Find a news source that is covering COVID-19 that is designed for each of the following audience types.

Your Community: \_\_\_\_\_

Your region: \_\_\_\_\_

National: \_\_\_\_\_

International: \_\_\_\_\_

What differences did you see in the content depending on the audience type? How were you able to identify which audience the story was trying to serve?



# PURPOSE

## WHY WAS THIS MADE?

Look for clues to the motivation.

- The publisher's mission
- Persuasive language or images
- Stated or unstated agendas
- Calls to action or moneymaking tactics

Think about why different media items are created. Is the goal to inform you, make you laugh, provide comfort, manipulate your emotions or offer an opinion? Why something is created can give us an idea of whether we should trust the story enough to use or share with others. As you encounter different types of media, check for mission statements and motivations behind the content.

Is it helpful to share posts with a harmful purpose if they raise awareness of the problem?

## Activity

Using the chart below, list the most common purposes behind why different media items are created. Write them into the column on the chart that you think best reflects how shareworthy the item is based on its purpose.

SHAREWORTHY	NOT SHAREWORTHY	SHARE WITH EXPLANATION

Scroll through social media or check results on a search engine. Consider the purpose of the first post you find on COVID-19 — why was this made? Which side of your shareworthy chart would it appear on? Would you share it anyway?



# EXECUTION

## HOW IS THIS INFORMATION PRESENTED?

Consider how the way it's made affects the impact.

- Style
- Grammer
- Tone
- Image choices
- Placement and layout

**Does the headline summarize the information or does it sound like the opening line to a blockbuster thriller? Pause for a moment to consider not just what a story says but how it presents the information. If it includes charts, can you easily find out what everything on the chart means? Do you see emotionally charged language or fear tactics?**

## Activity

**Choose a news item on COVID-19 to evaluate. On a scale of 1 to 10, where a 1 is very sloppy/poorly done and a 10 is very professionally/well done, rate each of the following elements of your story:**

**Clarity (the writer's ability to clearly present information)**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Style (the writer's tone and ability to engage a reader)**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Grammar, typos and spelling. Quality of images and graphics included (the writer's technical abilities)**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Layout/format (the way the story appears)**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Using your previous answers, give the story an overall ranking for the quality with which it was executed. What do you rank the story you found?**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Thinking on a scale of 1 to 10, what is the lowest number score that a story can get before you no longer trust the information presented?**