Applying News Assessment Skills

- Objective of this class: Train you to become more active and informed news consumers
- Learned about many aspects of news:
  - Who makes it, how it's made
  - How news operates within communities
  - Types of news (crime, education, business, etc.)
  - How journalistic investigations work
  - Peculiarities of international coverage
  - Characteristics of these types of news
  - Basic tools for analyzing these kinds of stories
- Now – up to you to apply all that you've learned to navigate through today's news environment

Today's news environment

- Previous generations – news came mostly from established local & national news outlets
- Now – an ocean of information
- Hundreds of outlets, most available to everyone
- Instant coverage (or expectation of it)
- Professional and non-professional
- Participate, not just consume
- Less established news hierarchy
- More difficult to stand out
- More opinion-driven material
- More difficult to know what to believe
- How do we navigate our way through this?

Navigating the News

What does it mean?

- Critically assessing news content from all sources
- Differentiating real, reported news from speculation, opinion, misinformation, stereotypes, fabricated material

What does it involve?

- Approaching news actively, not passively
- Questioning your initial reactions
- Looking at many sources w/different audiences, contexts
- Getting out of your comfort zone

Why does it matter?

- Being misinformed leads to making faulty choices
- Being informed – positive impact on others, society
- 'Garbage in, garbage out'

Navigating the News

Why is this such a concern in the digital age?

Data Smog – David Shenk, 1997

- Definition: The overwhelming amount of online information whose volume serves more to confuse the user than illuminate a topic.

- Written when most Americans didn't yet have Internet access

- 'Information, once rare and cherished like caviar, is now plentiful and taken for granted like potatoes'

- Predicted that too much information could lead to anxiety

- Foresaw echo chamber effect, 'virtual anarchy'

- Warned against 'stories that dissolve all complexity'

- Said news consumers would need to be their own editors

Navigating the News

Why is this such a concern in the digital age?

- Lack of news hierarchy
- Everything on social media treated as news
- Suspicion of traditional sources
- Information overload exhausts our brains
- Desire for lack of dissonance
- Familiar vs. unfamiliar
- Confirmation bias
- Ease of distribution
- Ease of alteration of info, images
- New ability for fringe groups to affect society
- Easier than ever to mislead thousands, millions

Navigating the News

Three important concepts:

- **Critical Thinking**
- **Media Literacy**
- **News Literacy**

Navigating the News

Critical Thinking

- Actively analyzing facts, evidence, observations, and arguments to form conclusions about a topic or event
- Get fullest possible understanding from considering multiple perspectives
- Approaching news stories with an open mind
- Can apply to all of life, not just news

Critical Thinking is *not*:

- **Cynicism** – belief that people are only interested in themselves – only motivated by selfish desires, greed
- **Nihilism** – belief that life has no real purpose or meaning, that no action or idea is truly good or evil
- **Reflexive Contrarianism** – instantly taking positions opposing what you think most people believe

Navigating the News

Media Literacy

- Understanding how different types of media work and being able to intelligently analyze their content
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of media (words, photos, video, audio, etc.)?
  - Written stories: Depth, detail, complexity, context, etc.
  - Photos: Engagement, empathy, beauty, legitimacy, etc.
  - Video: Immediacy, action, emotion, spectacle, etc.
  - Audio: Drama, focus, tension, personal nature, etc.
  - Graphics: Visual appeal, clarity, simplicity, etc.
- All appeal to audiences in different ways
- 'Implicit realness' – what does this mean?
- What are pitfalls of relying on one more than others?
- Can apply to all media content, not just journalism

Navigating the News

News Literacy

- The ability to judge whether news and other information is trustworthy
- Applying critical thinking skills to news stories and outlets, to analyze their credibility and reliability
- Understanding how items are chosen and designed to appeal to the outlets' audiences & communities
- For individual stories:
  - Consider the source – did this information come from a credible news source, or parts unknown?
  - Verify the information – can you find confirming info from reliable news outlets elsewhere?
  - What techniques and types of media are used?
  - Does it pass the smell test? Does it seem like clickbait?

Navigating the News

What News Literacy Requires

- Requires being an active consumer – not just passively accepting information as true
- Requires being open-minded, not assuming your existing beliefs and assumptions are always right
- Requires understanding how and by whom news is made, at least on a basic level
- Requires knowing that some material is intentionally made to misinform or mislead, or to inflame conflicts
- Requires adapting to different types of news stories from different places, cultures, contexts
- Requires being aware of stereotypes
- Is this too much to ask of people?

Navigating the News

Misinformation vs. Disinformation

Misinformation
- False, misleading or inaccurate info presented as fact
- People pass on bad information all the time
- Not created or shared with intent to deceive
- Can spread incredibly rapidly in digital age

Disinformation
- False or misleading information deliberately spread with intent to deceive, misguide or manipulate
- Takes advantage of information overload
- Usually done to push a political or social agenda
- Can spread incredibly rapidly in digital age

Navigating the News

Types of misinformation & disinformation

Satire/Parody
- No intention to cause harm, but potential to fool

Misleading Content
- Deceptive use of info to frame an issue or individual

Imposter Content
- Impersonating genuine sources

Fabricated Content
- Content is 100% false; created to deceive & do harm

False Connection
- Headlines, visuals etc. don't support story details

False Context
- Genuine content shared with false contextual info

Manipulated Content
- Genuine info or images altered to deceive

Adapted from Claire Wardle, "Fake News. It's Complicated," *Medium,* Feb 16, 2017.

Navigating the News

Why is misleading/deceptive content created?

- Poor journalism
- To parody
- To provoke or 'punk'
- Passion
- Partisanship
- For profit
- For political influence
- Propaganda

From Claire Wardle, "Fake News. It's Complicated," *Medium,* Feb 16, 2017.

Navigating the News

FIRSTDRAFT **MISINFORMATION MATRIX**

	SATIRE OR PARODY	FALSE CONNECTION	MISLEADING CONTENT	FALSE CONTEXT	IMPOSTER CONTENT	MANIPULATED CONTENT	FABRICATED CONTENT
POOR JOURNALISM		✓	✓	✓			
TO PARODY	✓				✓		✓
TO PROVOKE OR TO 'PUNK'					✓	✓	✓
PASSION				✓			
PARTISANSHIP			✓	✓			
PROFIT		✓			✓		✓
POLITICAL INFLUENCE			✓	✓		✓	✓
PROPAGANDA			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

From Claire Wardle, "Fake News. It's Complicated," *Medium,* Feb 16, 2017.

Early concept: Ongoing public discourse

- Founders saw media as vital to democracy
- Citizens' continuing discussion of social and political topics that are important to them
- Best ideas work their way into larger discussion, evolve into consensus
- Discourse both fuels democracy & responds to it
- Makes ordinary people feel involved

Navigating the News

Ongoing Public Discourse: Digital Age Issues

- Citizens' discussion of social and political topics
  - Online 'echo chambers' limit discussion to one point of view, shout down all who disagree
  - Anonymity can remove accountability
- Best ideas evolve into consensus
  - Consensus within groups can become intolerance for other opinions, disbelief that anyone rational could disagree
- Discourse both fuels democracy & responds to it
  - Single-mindedness can question democracy
- Makes ordinary people feel involved
  - Most powerful element of echo chambers
- Considered a vital element of democracy
  - Believed by many to be threat to democracy

**So considering all these factors,
how exactly do we Navigate the News?**

We'll sum it up next time…