Facts Matter

A guide to building **critical media literacy** in today's world

Respect, Connect, Act

How it's made

Check

Think

Pause

Values

Facts

News

8:20
Educating and Acting for a Better World

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

About the guide

Facts Matter is an introductory guide for adult literacy and adult education practitioners who wish to build their students' knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence in critical thinking, media and digital literacy. The guide also supports tutors to engage with what it means to live in an increasingly unequal world and to invite students to question and challenge this.

Facts Matter is an extension of the online resource **#BeyondTheClick: a teaching toolkit exploring global digital citizenship** produced by 80:20 and the **10+1 Elements for Global Digital Citizenship**, along with other resources and information. To access support materials, downloads and updates visit **https://8020.ie/facts-matter**

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- European Women's Lobby for use of social media visuals in #HerNetHerRights
- the Anti-Defamation League for the Hate Pyramid materials, and
- the International Federation of Library Associations for their 'How to Spot Fake News' graphics.

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Foreword

We are bombarded everyday by information, a lot of which is false or misleading – this is often called an **'infodemic'**.

We require skills to work out if what we are reading or hearing is true or false. This means taking the time to:

- find reliable and accurate information when reading the news (local, national and global);
- question the role of information, including the marketing of ideas in lots of formats; and
- explore answers to the question 'what can I do?'

"We need a vaccine against misinformation." **Mike Ryan,** head of the Health Emergencies Programme in the World Health Organisation (WHO)

"Debunking uninfluential alarmism comes at a cost. It diverts resources away from addressing the never-ending flood of misinformation coming from climate deniers who currently control the climate policy platform of the party in charge of one of the most powerful countries on Earth." Environmental scientist **Dana Nuccitelli,** 9 July 2018, The Guardian

"If you have a society where people can't agree on basic facts, how do you have a functioning democracy?" **Martin Baron,** the executive editor of the Washington Post

"At the very least, the widespread dysfunction in today's information ecosystem is a threat multiplier that vastly complicates society's ability to address major challenges." 2021 Doomsday Clock Statement by the **Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists**

"Part of what it is to be scientifically-literate, it's not simply, 'Do you know what DNA is? Or what the Big Bang is?' That's an aspect of science literacy. The biggest part of it is do you know how to think about information that's presented in front of you." **Neil DeGrasse Tyson,** astrophysicist

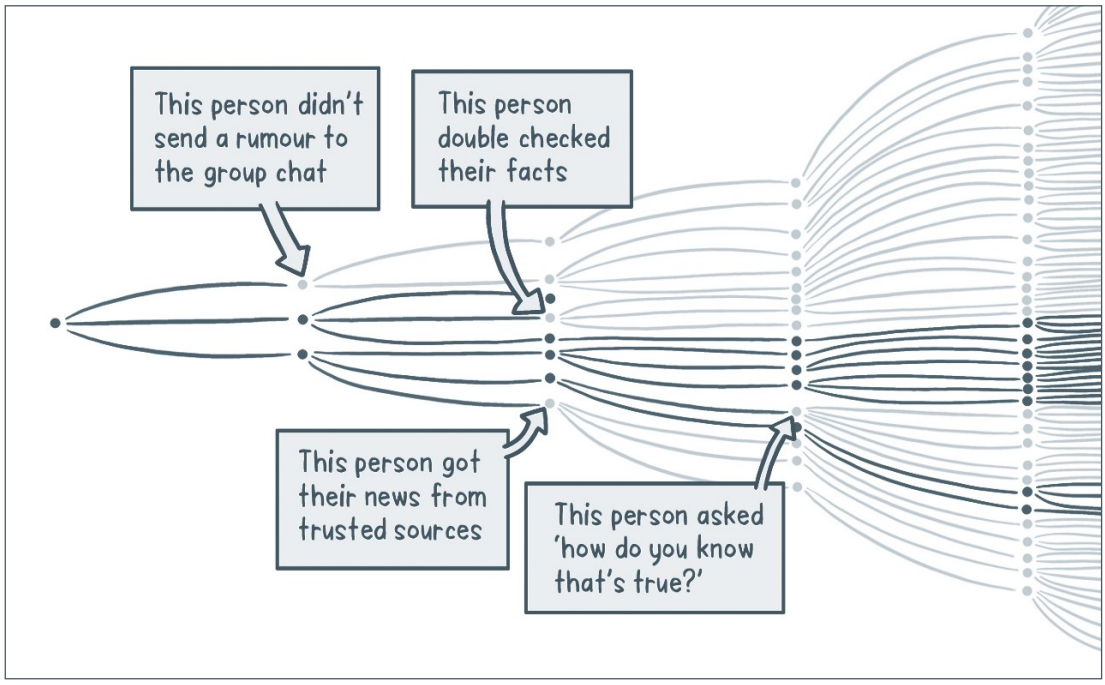
"Comment is free, but facts are sacred." **CP Scott,** former editor of UK-newspaper The Guardian

This guide supports these Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Introduction

There is so much information available at our fingertips right now.

We live in a world of facts, opinions, misinformation and lies. But how do we know if what we read or hear is true? How do we go about dissecting the spin behind news headlines and posts on social media? Who writes the story? Who benefits from it? Who is missing in the story? These are some of the questions that we explore in this guide.



Let's flatten the infodemic curve. Graphic by the World Health Organisation

A recent joint research project by Africa Check, Full Fact and Chequeado called 'Health misinformation in Africa, Latin America and the UK: impacts and possible solutions' sets a familiar yet uncomfortable scene:

> **"Covid-19 is a recent example in a long list of "misinfodemics" – outbreaks of misinformation which come to have as real an impact upon public health, as the epidemic itself. Communicable diseases such as influenza, Zika, and Ebola, which gain a lot of public attention around moments of outbreak, but also chronic conditions such as diabetes, and treatments such as vaccines, have all spurred "alternative explanations."**

Access the report at:
https://fullfact.org/media/uploads/en-tackling-health-misinfo.pdf

Developing the Facts Matter guide

This project explored how adult literacy and adult education practitioners can support students to enhance their critical thinking, media and digital citizenship skills. We need these essential life skills, particularly during this time when facts, truth, journalism and science-led information matter and are under assault across the world today.

In January and March 2020, we ran face-to-face workshops with adult literacy tutors and practitioners. During these we explored the '10+1 Elements for global digital citizenship' in practice. Then we discussed how tutors could work with their students to build critical thinking skills in media and digital settings. We also facilitated webinars in June 2020 – one for tutors and one for students. These were vital test-spaces for looking at real world challenges that were happening around us as we were developing the activities in this guide. We are hugely grateful to the many students, tutors, and learning centres for sharing their time, energy and experience during this project, in particular the staff and tutors of Bray Adult Education Centre in the Kildare and Wicklow region.

We hope you will find this guide useful in your work in fighting **truth decay**.

We welcome any feedback on the content and activities, particularly on how you used or adapted it and students' reactions.

Media literacy is not confined to 'reading' the news; it is also about practice and producing your own responses too. Keep questioning and remember to stop, think and check before you believe or share. To build a better society and a more equal world – listening matters; facts matter; staying curious and taking action matter.

Helen Ryan
The National Adult Literacy Agency

Tony Daly
80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World

MEDIA LITERACY IRELAND

NALA and 80:20 are members of Media Literacy Ireland. This is an independent association of members committed to the promotion of media literacy across Ireland.

More information at: **www.medialiteracyireland.ie**

Media Literacy Ireland run the 'Be Media Smart' campaign which asks people to: Stop - Think - Check.

Check out the website for more: **www.bemediasmart.ie**

This guide supports education and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The need for **critical thinking** to build our media and digital literacy skills

From the minute we wake up in the morning, there is news and information all around us, from many sources.

Let's pause and think for a minute – can you answer these questions:

- How much news have you consumed today? Where did you get most of that news from?
- How much of it do you believe? Did you question a story… if so, did you check it?
- If you checked sources, how did you do that?

We live in a busy world of news, information and messaging. These are presented to us in many ways – newspapers and magazines, leaflets, booklets, books, advertising, billboards, television, radio, the Internet, social media, telephone messaging and word of mouth.

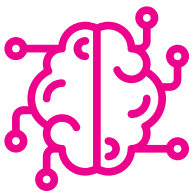
More recently, we are living through an **infodemic** – the rapid far-reaching spread of inaccurate and incorrect information. In a global pandemic such as COVID-19, information can be a life-saver, when it's accurate and timely. Wrong information, at a minimum, can cause confusion and mistrust and can often make things worse.

We know that we cannot believe every piece of information we read or hear. That is why we must use our **critical thinking skills** to question it, get the facts, check the sources and find the 'kernel of truth'. The role of experts, such as doctors, pilots, scientists and reporters aren't simply a matter of opinion. A good opinion isn't enough to fly a plane or try open heart surgery. And we should not like or share information unless we know it is from a trusted and reliable source (for example, established news agencies) and has evidence to back it up (not hearsay or gossip).

Critical thinking is a way of thinking where you set out to understand what is going on. You don't accept all arguments and conclusions initially but instead you question, analyse and evaluate an issue so you can form a reasonable opinion. It is about:

- being able to think clearly and rationally and understanding the connections between ideas;
- being active and not passive; and engaging in reflection and independent thinking.

Critical thinkers **question ideas** and **assumptions** rather than accepting them at face value. They will always seek to determine whether the ideas, arguments and findings represent the entire picture and are open to finding that they do not.



6 reasons why becoming media savvy and reading the world are essential today

1. **Personal Development** – Everyone sees or hears the news. Investing time in building and testing out our own 'literacy' is as much about **'reading' the world** as it is about producing content, such as posts, blogs or live videos that end up on media, whether its social media or community channels.

2. **Explore the issues and build a shared truth** – Devaluing of shared truths, deepening polarisation, nationalism in politics and the mainstreaming of hate speech have all been fuelled by a global '**infodemic**'. This has made the role of encouraging and supporting students to evaluate and think critically urgent and necessary. Educators therefore need to better understand how students access and integrate information, how media works and how values such as human rights, equality, fairness and dignity underpin the kind of society we want.

3. **Education and democracy** – It's important for all of us to continue to determine a way forward during a time when many of the **core values of education**—fact-based arguments, civility, inclusivity and cultivating curiosity—are under assault. They are under assault due to the explosion of disinformation and its impact and reach to people of all ages.

4. **Taking perspectives** – While everyone has a bias of one kind or another, it is vital that we search for perspectives that are both inside and outside our bubbles and filters. Understanding **unconscious bias** as a social justice issue means that dominant stories can affect the dignity and human rights of others. This particularly happens when we only hear from one point of view rather than a diverse range of stories, experiences and roles.

5. **Public goods (and not just private!)** – It matters to invest time and energy to ask **what kind of public services we want**, such as public broadcasting services or a public health service for all. Challenge the idea that what we 'own' together (common goods) should become private (owned by the few), while what is private (our own data and identity) should become public (an available 'commodity').

6. **We all have an impact** – Everyone can make a difference by being **actively critical** about what they 'read' in the news, on billboards, in videos and online, and in how we respond or act. We can do or say something different. Use your chance to dismantle stereotypes and challenge the status quo. Making change happen is often uncomfortable. Remember Rosa Parks. **Set an example**.

How to use this guide

In this guide we explore 10 themes and session plans so you can:

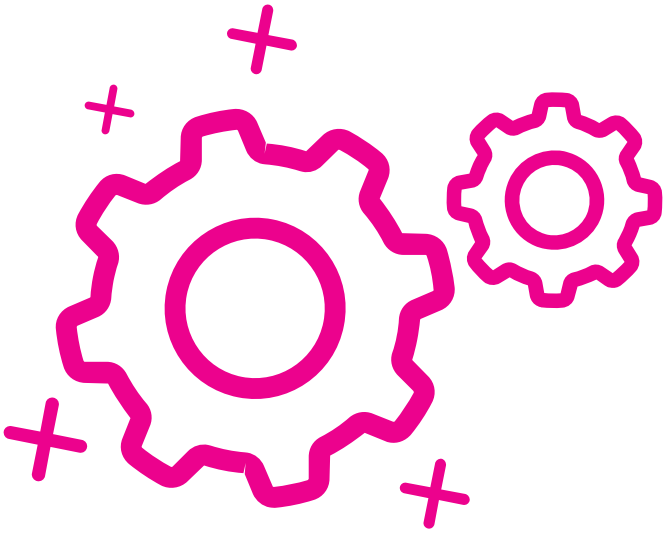
- facilitate 10 sessions on media and digital literacy;
- pick a relevant session to deliver at a certain time; and
- pick and choose activities and integrate them into your class.

Aim of sessions

These sessions aim to **develop critical thinking in media and digital spaces.** It also builds our digital citizenship skills in today's online world.

The objectives are to:

- Provide an opportunity for participants to s**hare their experience, knowledge and understanding** about news media and information today.
- Explore and develop **critical thinking skills** to assess and challenge news and information, especially online.
- Gain skills about **how to check and source** accurate news and information.
- **Read the world** critically from many perspectives.
- Reflect on **key values and ideas** by asking 'what matters' in building a better, fairer and more just society.
- Become more **confident** to think critically and **take action** as an active digital citizen.



How to use this guide

Activities

There are 10 session plans with activities and exercises that you can use and adapt for your students.

We also include some audio and video links along with handouts and worksheets. You can also use or adapt some **PowerPoint slides** during some sessions which you can download at this link **https://8020.ie/facts-matter**

Session	Slide title
1	Newspaper headline, image, tweet
2	Symbols of online applications
4	Wikipedia geography of knowledge
5	Trust and the media survey results How does Facebook choose what to show in the news feed
6	Mis-information/Dis-information/Mal-information Why is 'fake news' disinformation created?
7	Stop – think – check

Activities before the sessions

Check with the students if they are okay with doing an activity before the class, such as watching a video, listening to a podcast or radio interview. You can also see if the group would like to set up a closed WhatsApp or Facebook group to discuss the topics while they are on the course.

Planning and reviewing your learning sessions

Planning before the session

- **Find out** a little about your students and the group before you design and customise a session.
- In delivering a **literacy friendly course**, you should consider literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs and remove any related barriers to participation. Try to think of ways to present information that does not involve too much text on screen or too many statistics – use videos, audio, photographs and visuals.
- There are a number of **worksheets and handouts** that you can print and use in the sessions.
- In each session there is usually a **video or audio** to listen to so check your laptop and sound.
- Consider using a **digital whiteboard**, or inviting students to display or present their work.
- Check that you have **flip-chart paper, paper, post-its, pens and markers**.

At the beginning of the session

- **Welcome the group** and allow time for people to introduce themselves and say what they want from the session.
- Write **expectations** on a flipchart page. Identify any objectives that you will not have time to cover and park them for another day. You can follow up with person afterwards if necessary.
- Show the **objectives** of the session and agree them.
- Set some **ground rules**.

Planning and reviewing your learning sessions

During the session

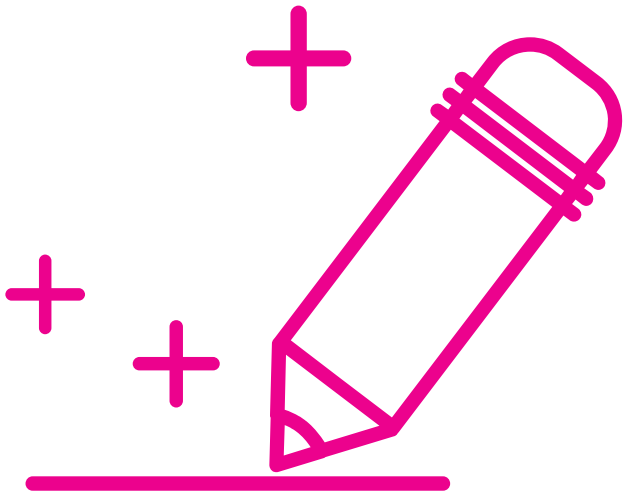
- There are a number of **worksheets** that can be used during each session – these are optional.
- There are some **handouts** you can print and give out – these provide information.

Review

- Touch base with participants **throughout the session** to check if they have any questions or need more information or support.

Evaluation

- Make sure you leave time to build in a **feedback exercise** at the end. You will find a template for a **reflection sheet** and **feedback form** in appendix 3 (pages 84 and 85) – you can use this or customise your own.
- If appropriate, ask permission to send people on the slides and handouts from the session.
- You can suggest some **further readings** (see end of the guide for recommendations).



Outline and structure of sessions

Each session is approximately 1 hour (60 minutes). However you could spend longer on activities if time allowed. The sessions are written with face-to-face delivery in mind however can be adapted for online tuition. You can also adjust time and pick and choose activities to integrate into other learning sessions.

Activities during the sessions

In the sessions, we suggest some activities based around watching, listening or reading; thinking; questioning closely (dig deeper), discussing and reflecting.

Activities	Broad outline
Watch, listen or read	**Watch, listen or read** a story – it can be a short video, audio recording or a newspaper article or tweet.
Think	**Ask a few questions** about what you have watched, heard or read. You can invite the students to jot down some notes in a handout on their own first and then discuss in small groups of 2 or 3.
Dig deeper	This is where we **question things more closely** – do