Critically Reading Media Messages

*Preparation time: **30'***   *Teaching time: **1 x 60'***

Abstract

This lesson provides an in-depth exploration of how to analyze media messages with a critical eye. Participants learn to identify common signs of bias, manipulation, and unreliable information across various media formats. Through practical examples and group exercises, students will develop the skills needed to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different sources. This lesson promotes responsible media consumption, enabling learners to make well-informed judgments in an information-rich world.

Online educational resources

- Lesson on Critically Reading Media Messages from the Sorting Facts from Fiction online Moodle course
- Quiz on Critically Reading Media Messages from the Sorting Facts from Fiction online Moodle course
- Fact-checking tools/websites (e.g., *Faktograf, Raskrikavanje*)

Keywords

Media Literacy,
Bias Detection,
Source Credibility,
Fact-Checking,
Manipulative Language,
Critical Thinking

Lesson aim

- **Help** students recognize bias and manipulation in various media messages.
- **Guide** students in evaluating the reliability of media sources by analyzing their purpose, language use, and credibility.
- **Provide** practical tools and skills - such as fact-checking and reverse image searching - for verifying media content and assessing its truthfulness.

Lesson outcome

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
- **Identify** and describe common signs of bias and unreliable information in the media.
- **Evaluate** source credibility by analysing intent, language, and factual backing.
- **Use** simple and effective methods to fact-check or verify media claims.
- **Understand** how emotional triggers and persuasive tactics can shape audience perception and opinion.

Lesson implementation process

min. 1 - 5: Warming Up

- **Activity**: Ask students to quickly brainstorm where they see media messages most often (e.g., social platforms, ads, news sites).
- **Discussion**: Prompt them to share recent media messages that caught their attention. Why did those messages stand out? (e.g., shocking headlines, emotional language, interesting visuals)

min. 6 - 20: Collaborative Learning

- Presentation on Key Concepts: *Identifying Bias, Evaluating Source Reliability, and Recognizing Intent*
- Group Activity: Have students compare two articles covering the same event but with different tones or word choices. Ask them to note differences in phrasing, selection of facts, or slant. Discuss how these subtle choices can shape public perception.

min. 21 - 50: Practical Application

- Tool Demonstrations: Show how to perform a reverse image search and see if an image is used in a misleading context. Visit a fact-checking site and Walk through an example of how a viral claim was authenticated or debunked.
- Activity to *spot manipulative language*: Display a set of headlines or short text excerpts, some using strongly emotional or sensational words. Students highlight or underline manipulative language and note what effect it might have on readers.
- Discussion: Reflect on how quickly we can be influenced if we don't pause to ask, *"Who wrote this? Why? What's the evidence?"*

min. 51 - 60: Conclusion

- Summary: Recap the importance of recognizing bias, understanding sources, and fact-checking.
- Reflective Questions: *"How can identifying bias change your perception of an online post?"* or *"Why do some media outlets rely on emotional triggers, and how might this affect public discourse?"*
- Encourage students to apply at least one verification step before sharing any potentially controversial content.

Materials / Tools

Projector or screen for showing media samples; Internet-connected devices; Links to lesson and quiz on the online Moodle course; Access to websites for fact-checking and reverse image search.