



Teaching With Checkology During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This guide is an outline of suggested lessons, activities and supporting questions for educators using the News Literacy Project’s [Checkology virtual classroom](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an overwhelming amount of information about the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, and helping students meaningfully evaluate everything they encounter – especially potential pieces of misinformation – is essential.

Consider this a road map for using Checkology to teach students key skills for evaluating information, identifying misinformation, and recognizing quality journalism from standards-based news organizations. Many of the supporting questions and suggested blending activities are designed to help you advise students as they apply these skills to the news and other information they encounter.

When setting up your class in Checkology, look for the “COVID-19” experience in the teacher dashboard. For more information, visit the [Checkology Experiences](#) section of our online [Teacher Handbook](#), or watch the [Premium account setup tutorial](#).

Essential Question: How can I be reliably informed about COVID-19?

Activity: Individually or in groups, have students curate a list of credible sources of information, including health and government officials, medical experts, standards-based news organizations, and individual journalists on social media. (Their lists should be comprehensive without being overwhelming or more than most people could keep up with on a daily basis.) Have students compile their lists in a spreadsheet, then combine the student lists and add a column where you can note duplicate submissions so students can see which sources were most often selected by the group. Ask students to continue working on the master list by suggesting other sources, by adding comments or by flagging problematic sources.

If you’re willing to do so, please send a link (or a copy of your list) to edteam@newslit.org.

For support with your implementation, or with the Checkology platform itself, contact support@checkology.org.

Lesson	Objectives	Application
InfoZones	Students will learn to identify different kinds of information and to determine the primary purpose of a piece of information.	Help students practice “zoning information” using timely examples of information about COVID-19. Use these supporting questions to discuss the differences that students notice in these examples:

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	<p>COVID-19 connection: Understanding how news, opinion and raw information differ and how to identify propaganda are crucial skills during this global crisis. They are a foundational part of being informed.</p>	<p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would information from different zones affect your understanding of the pandemic? • Is one zone of information more useful than the others? • What are the advantages and drawbacks of raw information about the virus? • How are companies using COVID-19 in their advertising? • Should satire sites like The Onion or The Babylon Bee avoid publishing items about the pandemic to ensure that no one takes such “information” seriously?
<p>Misinformation</p>	<p>Students will be able to identify five distinct types of misinformation and explain how understanding the differences helps them to recognize and debunk falsehoods.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: In a crisis, avoiding misinformation can be a matter of life and death. Viral rumors — such as false cures, out-of-context images, conspiracy theories and fabrications intended as jokes — can have very real consequences in people’s lives. Your role in teaching about the pandemic includes helping your students to realize that misinformation has an impact — and that they have a responsibility to stop its spread, especially during a public health crisis.</p>	<p>Review examples of misinformation about the pandemic with students, using one or more of the sources below. As you do, prompt students to identify the type of misinformation in each example, setting aside any particularly difficult examples for further discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Here’s A Running List Of The Latest Hoaxes Spreading About The Coronavirus” (Jane Lytvynenko, BuzzFeed News). • Lead Stories. • PolitiFact. • Snopes. • AFP Fact Check. <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How dangerous is misinformation about this pandemic? • Why do people share misinformation? • How can you work to stop the spread of viral misinformation? • Should anyone be allowed to post anything they like on social media platforms? Why or why not? • Should social media platforms take even more steps to stop the spread of falsehoods?

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<p>Arguments & Evidence</p>	<p>Students will learn to evaluate arguments that are supported by evidence and be able to recognize five common logical fallacies.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: Like all major events, the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked speculation and debate. As educators, you can help students to understand the roles of opinion journalism and reasoned debate in our society and to evaluate the quality of the arguments they encounter.</p>	<p>Ask students to collect examples of opinions about the pandemic (and to go out of their way to find opinions they disagree with). Then have them use what they learned in this lesson to evaluate the quality of each opinion, the evidence provided as support, and the use of sound reasoning (which includes an avoidance of logical fallacies).</p> <p>You might also have students go on a COVID-19 logical fallacies “scavenger hunt” online, collecting examples of all five of the fallacies introduced in the lesson. Are the authors or creators of these examples using logical fallacies to confuse or mislead?</p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What important elements are required for a reputable opinion piece? • What role do columnists and other professional opinion commentators play in our society? • Should people seek out quality opinions they disagree with? Why or why not? • Are opinion pieces helping to make this uncertain time easier to understand or adding to the confusion?
<p>Understanding Bias</p>	<p>Students can identify different types of potential bias in news reporting and summarize the forms those biases can take in coverage.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: Recognizing fair and accurate news coverage is vital during a crisis. Cynicism about the news media — such as the belief that all news outlets are intentionally skewing coverage — is extremely common, especially among teens. This kind of blanket distrust of mainstream news organizations can put</p>	<p>The current crisis has unleashed a tsunami of information. Using the types of bias detailed in this lesson, have students examine information from a variety of news outlets and determine which outlets are aspiring to be as unbiased (fair and accurate) as possible in their reporting and which appear to be overtly biased.</p> <p>If you created the list of credible sources suggested at the top of this guide, consider adding some of the news organizations that students agree are least biased.</p>

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	students at a serious disadvantage as they work to stay informed.	
Practicing Quality Journalism	<p>Students can understand and apply seven core standards of quality journalism in a simulated breaking news event.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: Identifying “quality” news outlets requires a working knowledge of recognized standards of journalism. While many of those standards, such as the minimization of bias, are aspirational and highly subjective, it’s still important for young people to understand these standards so they can recognize them in practice and respond to coverage that they believe is problematic. This is more important than ever during a global health crisis. In addition, this lesson teaches students about different types of sources in news reporting — such as officials, experts and eyewitnesses. This will help students better understand and evaluate the credibility of the fast-moving developments in this outbreak.</p>	<p>Collect five news reports about the same aspect of the pandemic from the same news cycle, then have students rate each one according to the seven standards of quality journalism they learned to apply in this lesson.</p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some news outlets that clearly have high standards? What are some news outlets that clearly do not? (Explain your responses by citing specifics.) • If a standard or guideline in journalism is impossible to achieve, is it still worth pursuing? • What does it mean for a news report to be “fair”? • Are corrections a sign of credibility? Why or why not? • What are the advantages and drawbacks of official sources? What about eyewitness sources? • Why is important for newsrooms to be independent? • What kinds of background and context are journalists providing to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic? Why is this context important?
Democracy’s Watchdog	<p>Students learn about the watchdog role of a free press in a democracy and examine several Supreme Court cases that have interpreted the First Amendment’s protections of free speech and a free press.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: Free expression has limits and comes with responsibilities.</p>	<p>Challenge students to find examples of watchdog journalism related to the pandemic. You might assign teams of students to find investigative reporting about an issue, or ask each student to find one national, one regional and one local watchdog example. Then have students brainstorm a list of questions about the pandemic that deserve answers from public officials.</p>

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	<p>This lesson helps draw key questions about the advantages and disadvantages of free speech into focus for students. For example, some people in China have used social media to get around government censors and make important information available to the world, while other people are using social media to spread misinformation and sow confusion.</p>	<p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do journalists play to ensure the public is informed about how COVID-19 started and spread around the world? • If you were an investigative journalist focusing on the pandemic, what would you be looking into? What information would you be trying to get? • Do First Amendment protections of free speech apply on social media? Why or why not?
<p>Press Freedoms Around the World</p>	<p>Students can explain four factors that determine press freedom and compare the ways that countries protect — or restrict — journalists.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: The COVID-19 pandemic is the dominant news story in many countries around the world. This is a unique chance for you to engage students in a discussion of press freedoms and to analyze coverage from around the world.</p>	<p>Have students use this lesson’s interactive press freedom map, then compare the data there with data about the spread of the COVID-19 virus (such as this interactive map from Johns Hopkins University). You could also compare the lesson map with headlines from around the world using “Today’s Front Pages,” the Newseum’s daily collection of newspaper front pages.</p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can a country’s level of press freedom affect its health outcomes? Why or why not? • Does the U.S. have the highest level of press protections in the world? • What factors make a press “free”? • Can news organizations publish anything they like without fear of repercussions? • Why is it important for news organizations and journalists to be protected from being sued for accurate coverage?
<p>What Is News?</p>	<p>Students can explain the concept of “newsworthiness” and name four factors that determine whether information is newsworthy. Students develop their own</p>	<p>Have students track pandemic coverage in their local news outlets and discuss the differences in coverage, if any, between local and national news outlets. You might also have students use the Google Trends coronavirus dashboard to explore questions people are asking, then try to determine how many of the commonly</p>

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	<p>sense of news judgment by evaluating the newsworthiness of a series of examples.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: With fear and uncertainty running high right now, some media outlets — including some news organizations — will publish sensational, “clickbait” stories to capitalize on the intense public interest. Teaching students what sound news judgment is empowers them to enter into discussions about the topics and issues that need more coverage or attention and the ones that are getting too much coverage or attention.</p>	<p>searched questions are answered by the news coverage they see. Finally, you could have students use the Newseum’s “Today’s Front Pages” to analyze which types of stories are getting featured on front pages around the world, and how those top stories differ.</p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the most important aspects of the pandemic also the most interesting? • How can news outlets get people to take the outbreak seriously without straying into sensationalism and clickbait? • If you were the decision-maker at a news outlet in your community, what would be your top story today?

Enrichment	Objectives	Application
<p>The Check Center</p>	<p>Students learn how to verify the credibility and authenticity of the information they encounter. Students can successfully complete one or more fact-checking challenges that require multiple verification skills.</p> <p>COVID-19 connection: This area of the platform can be used in several compelling ways. In the context of the flood of misinformation about this outbreak, please consider underscoring lateral reading as an essential first step in verifying online content. Students’ primary tool for dealing</p>	<p>Quick Check: Students check a piece of information they found online.</p> <p>Toolbox: Students watch tutorials on digital verification tips and skills.</p> <p>Missions: Students investigate a real-world piece of information presented by NLP and answer questions about it.</p> <p>Examine this journalist's Twitter thread about a man who was hoarding 17,700 bottles of hand sanitizer to see how she was able to discover where he kept it: https://twitter.com/EmilyGorcenski/status/1239306776153071618?s=20</p>

	<p>with questionable photos and videos online is reverse image search. After reviewing skills and tools, they can use Quick Check to examine a piece of information in more detail.</p>	
<p>Newsroom to Classroom Program</p>	<p>Newsroom to Classroom enables Checkology educators to invite journalists to speak with their students, either remotely or (eventually) in person.</p>	<p>Ask a journalist to speak about deciding what to cover during the pandemic or about debunking misinformation.</p>
<p>The Sift®</p>	<p>The Sift is NLP's weekly newsletter for educators; it sorts through recent examples of misinformation to bring you teachable moments in news literacy.</p>	<p>The Sift is on summer hiatus and will return in September. You can review past issues for possible use with students at https://newslit.org/educators/sift/.</p>