HANDOUT 3.1:
THE INFO ZONES

PRIMARY INFO ZONES

NEWS **OPINION** **ADVERTISEMENT** **ENTERTAINMENT**
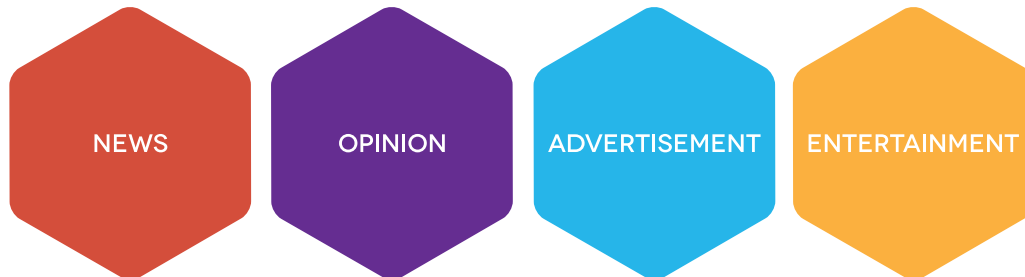
NEWS (ALSO REFERRED TO AS "STRAIGHT" OR "HARD" NEWS, NEWS ARTICLE OR NEWS REPORT)
News is a report on an event, individual, issue or some other subject that is produced primarily **to inform** its audience.

- News should be about topics that are relevant, interesting, important and unique.
- News is produced according to ideals, or standards, that ensure the greatest degree of credibility possible.
- An most important standard is an effort to minimize bias in all forms.

- Quality news reports provide an accurate, balanced, fair and thorough account of the subject.
- The facts and context of news reports may cause people to form strong opinions, but the reports should not be produced with the purpose of persuading.

- Beware of anonymous news reports! You should always be able to tell who created the news you consume.
- News reports should give people the information they need to make up their own minds about the subject.

PURPOSE: TO INFORM

OPINION (ALSO REFERRED TO AS EDITORIALS, COLUMNS AND COMMENTARY)
Opinion is any information that is created **to persuade** people in some way, usually by making claims about a political or social issue and presenting facts and other evidence to support those claims.

- Even though opinion pieces are part of most news media products (including newspapers, broadcasts and websites), they should always be labeled as opinion to make it easy for people to distinguish them from news.
- Information in the opinion zone should also be designed to primarily appeal to the minds of its audience, rather than their emotions.

- In broadcast news shows, opinion content includes some talk shows as well as political pundits, analysts and commentators.
- It is important for news organizations to prevent the opinions they publish or broadcast from influencing their news reporting.

- The facts and other information used as evidence in opinion pieces still need to be accurate. (t has been said that people have a right to their opinions, but not to their own facts!)

PURPOSE: TO PERSUADE

ADVERTISEMENT
Advertisement is any content that is designed **to sell** a product or service.

- Advertisements usually run in space (in a newspaper or on a website) or in a block of time (on television or radio) that is purchased from media companies.
- Media companies use this revenue to support other kinds of content (news reports, comedy shows on television, etc.)

- Many advertisements are obvious, but some are designed to look like news, entertainment or other types of information.
- In a news publication, all advertisements should be labeled.

- Quality news organizations seek to separate staff members who work on advertising and those who work on news content to make sure advertisers do not influence news coverage

*PURPOSE: TO SELL*

ENTERTAINMENT
Entertainment is any information or content that is created **to entertain** its audience. In other words, anything intended to amuse, please, relax or distract people.

- Entertainment can take many forms, including radio and television shows; songs, movies and short videos; novels, comic books and magazines; and websites, video games and mobile apps.

- Even though some pieces of entertainment may be informative, or express an opinion, they are still created primarily to entertain.

- Remember that what matters in deciding what belongs in the entertainment zone is its primary purpose.

PURPOSE: TO ENTERTAIN

HANDOUT 3.1:
THE INFO ZONES

SECONDARY INFO ZONES

PUBLICITY   **PROPAGANDA**   **RAW INFORMATION**
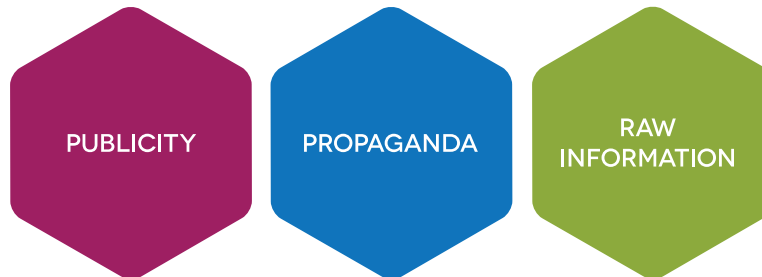
PUBLICITY

Publicity is any information that is created **to promote** a person, product, service, event, cause or other private interest.

- Celebrities, companies and other organizations work with public relations (PR) firms to release strategic information to journalists through press releases.
- Press releases are announcements designed to get the attention of journalists and to encourage them to do a story about the subject.

- Journalists should always make independent choices about which press release ideas they would like to pursue.
- Journalists should also be sure to report the full story instead of just recycling or reproducing the information in the press release.

- Sometimes pieces of information from other zones (like news) can have a promotional *effect* on their subjects, but they should not be considered publicity unless they were created with the *intent* to promote.

PURPOSE: TO PROMOTE

PROPAGANDA

Propaganda is information that is created **to distort** an issue with the goal of swaying the opinions of people, usually in a way that is not fair, rational or responsible.

- Propaganda may include facts and other supporting evidence, but these are usually carefully selected to have an emotional (instead of a rational) effect on the audience.
- Propaganda also frequently distorts its subject by taking key points, statistics, quotes or other kinds of evidence unfairly out of context.

- Even though both opinion and propaganda are created to persuade, propaganda deliberately distorts an issue by appealing to emotion whereas opinion is an attempt to persuade through reason and rational argument

- Often, propaganda uses aggressive, loaded or distorting language and includes a call to action or request for its audience to do something.

PURPOSE: TO DISTORT

RAW INFORMATION

The purpose of raw information **is complicated**. In short, raw information is any piece of information that is unprocessed—that is, has not been analyzed, checked, explained or placed in context.

- Some of the most common types of raw information are cell phone videos and pictures.
- Other kinds of primary sources are also considered raw, such as data, letters or emails, government reports (like police reports) and historical documents (i.e. the U.S. Constitution).

- The amount of raw information available to the public has grown rapidly in the digital age, largely through the use of handheld devices.
- Journalists often use raw information in their reports, but it is important that they vet, or check, the information thoroughly to make sure it is authentic and accurate.

- It is also important that journalists analyze raw information and present it in as fair a manner as possible by giving their audience the context necessary to understand it.
- it is advisable for everyone to check the authenticity and consider the fairness of a piece of raw information before sharing it with others.

PURPOSE: IT'S COMPLICATED

CHECK IT OUT!

Determining what Info Zone you're in when you encounter a new piece of information is an important first step to determining its credibility. Asking yourself "What is the primary purpose of this?" and "Who created this?" is an excellent way to approach new information, especially when you're considering basing a decision on it. You can also quickly look for red flags like:

- unnamed authors or creators of the information
- the use of loaded language

- broad, overreaching statements (i.e "Most teenagers today are lazy.")
- unsupported assertions (statements that mention evidence but don't provide it)