

# News Literacy in America (2024):

## Key Findings

American teens spend hours each day scrolling social media platforms, immersing themselves in an often-confusing stream of entertainment, ads, news, rumors and conspiracy theories. Young people need the knowledge, skills and habits of mind to assess the credibility and authenticity of news and information they encounter as they navigate this complex landscape. Otherwise, they will remain at a civic and personal disadvantage throughout their lives.

To learn about teens' information behaviors and mindsets, assess the state of news literacy education and identify ways to ensure young people become well-informed, critical thinkers, the News Literacy Project engaged SSRS, a full-service social science and market research firm, to conduct a nationally representative, probability-based online survey of 1,110 teens ages 13-18 in May 2024. The margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 4.1$  percentage points, but margins of error for subgroups will be larger.



This research aims to inform educators and policymakers as they weigh how to best integrate news literacy in schools — and to help journalists and researchers better understand the needs of young people in this area. These key findings provide an overview of the report's main data points and offer valuable insights into how teenagers think about, experience and engage with today's information landscape. The full report will be available on our website on Oct. 21 at [newslit.org](https://newslit.org).



For more information, visit [newslit.org](https://newslit.org)  
or contact us at [info@newslit.org](mailto:info@newslit.org).

# 1. Teens want media literacy instruction included in their education, but most aren't getting it.

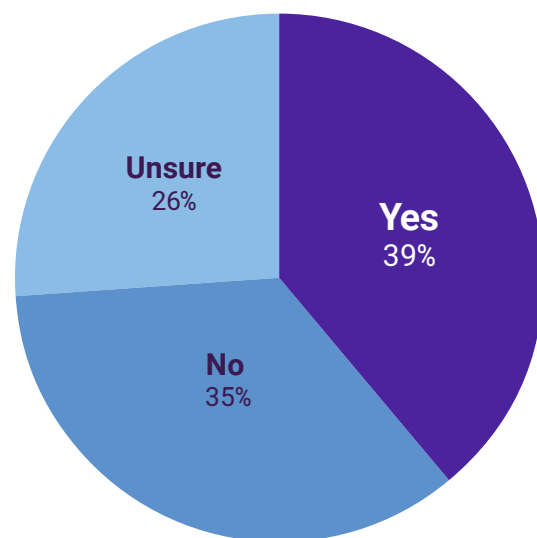
An overwhelming majority of teens (94%) say that schools should be required to teach media literacy. Fully 57% offer strong support, saying schools should “definitely” have such a requirement, and another 36% offer some support, saying schools should have a requirement in some cases.

Despite widespread support among teens, we found little evidence that schools were already providing media literacy instruction. Only 39% of teens report having had any media literacy instruction in at least one class during the 2023-24 school year.



## Only 39% of teens say their classes included any media literacy instruction during the 2023-24 school year

Have any of your classes at school this year included any media literacy instruction?



Note: Results based on the 1,109 teens who responded to this question.

Source: SSRS survey for the News Literacy Project conducted online from May 17 - 28, 2024, with 1,110 teenagers ages 13-18 nationwide.

## 2. Regardless of age, teens struggle to distinguish between different types of information.

Half of teens can identify a branded content article as an advertisement, 52% can identify an article with “commentary” in the headline as an opinion and 59% can recognize that Google search results under the label “sponsored” indicate paid advertising. But less than 2 in 10 teens (18%) correctly answered all three questions asking them to distinguish between different types of information.

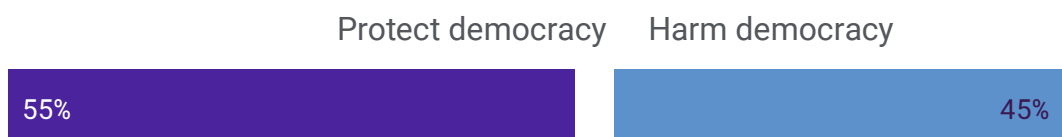
Results were not significantly different by age groups, meaning older teens are generally no better at demonstrating this foundational news literacy skill than younger teens.

## 3. Nearly half of teens think the press does more to harm democracy than protect it.

Just over half of teens (55%) say that journalists do more to protect democracy, while 45% say journalists do more to harm democracy. Two groups stand out as being particularly likely to say journalists protect democracy: teens who actively seek out news to stay informed (68%) and teens with high trust in news media (82%).

### 45% of teens say journalists do more to harm democracy than protect it

Would you say that professional journalists and the organizations they work for in the United States are doing more to...



Source: SSRS survey for the News Literacy Project conducted online from May 17 - 28, 2024, with 1,110 teenagers ages 13-18 nationwide.

## 4. About two-thirds of teens are not concerned about the sharp decline in the number of news organizations in recent decades.

Sixty-seven percent of teens say they are a little or not at all concerned about the sharp decline in the number of news organizations in the U.S. over the last 20 years. Among teens who don't really keep up with news, 78% say they are a little or not at all concerned about the sharp decline. Similarly, 74% of those with low trust in news media say the same.



## 5. Many teens are at least somewhat trusting of news media, but still perceive high levels of bias in the news.

Most teens (65%) gave at least some trusting responses to the three survey questions that make up our news media trust index; however, only 8% responded to all three questions with trusting responses. Teens who say they had at least some media literacy instruction in at least one class are especially likely to have at least some trust in news media (73% with medium or high trust).

The two questions that received the most distrusting responses from teens were both about news media bias. Nearly 7 in 10 teens (69%) believe that news organizations intentionally add bias to coverage to advance a specific perspective and 8 in 10 say that the information that news organizations produce is either more biased than or about the same as other content creators online.

## 6. Most teens on social media encounter conspiracy theories and are inclined to believe one or more of them.

Eight in 10 teens on social media say they see posts that spread or promote conspiracy theories, but the frequency of their exposure varies. Twenty percent of teens who use social media report seeing these posts in their feeds daily, 31% report seeing them weekly and 29% report seeing them less than once a week.

Many of the conspiracy theories teens report seeing go well beyond harmless superstitions. They include narratives such as the Earth being flat, the 2020 election being rigged or stolen, and the COVID vaccine being dangerous.



While teens on social media aren't necessarily inclined to believe every conspiracy theory they encounter, an overwhelming majority of those who report seeing a conspiracy theory on social media (81%) say they are inclined to believe one or more of them.

### Roughly 8 in 10 teens inclined to believe one or more conspiracy theories they see on their social media feeds

How many, if any, of the conspiracy theories you see being spread or promoted online do you think are likely to be true?

A lot
  Some
  Very few
  None



Note: Results based on the 862 teens who responded to this question.

Source: SSRS survey for the News Literacy Project conducted online from May 17 - 28, 2024, with 1,110 teenagers ages 13-18 nationwide.

## 7. Few teens are regular users of generative artificial intelligence technologies, and many are skeptical of the information they produce.

Less than one quarter of teens (23%) say they use generative AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, Gemini or Copilot, once a week or more. Even fewer teens (9%) report using AI image generators, such as DALL-E, Midjourney, DreamStudio or Gemini, once a week or more. These findings challenge the notion that AI tools have already upended the way young people approach schoolwork.

When asked if they trust generative AI chatbots to produce information that is accurate and fair, many teens were skeptical. Only 36% of teens report having at least a fair amount of trust in these tools to generate accurate information, while half of teens report having little to no trust in the accuracy and fairness of these AI tools.

## 8. While few teens tend to seek out news, those who do are more likely to also have other healthy news habits.

When it comes to news habits, only 15% of teens say they actively seek out news to stay informed. Most teens say they either keep up with news without really trying (50%) or don't really keep up with news (36%).

Being an active news seeker is associated with other healthy news literacy practices. Teens who actively seek out news and use social media are especially likely to follow more journalists and news organizations and frequently like, share and post about issues or events in the news.

Those active news seekers who like, share or post about news on social media are also more likely to say they always fact-check content before doing so. And, finally, being an active news seeker is associated with engaging in one or more civic-minded activities, such as referencing credible sources when sharing an opinion and reaching out to a journalist or news outlet to offer feedback on a story.



# Recommendations



The News Literacy in America report outlines the current state of news literacy among teens and, in doing so, uncovers opportunities to strengthen teens' news literacy skills, knowledge and habits of mind before high school graduation. Given the results of our survey, we present the following **six recommendations** to help achieve this goal.



- 1** Support robust state-level media literacy education policies.
- 2** Spend time on news literacy basics — especially distinguishing between information types.
- 3** Foster an appreciation for the role a free press plays in democracy.
- 4** Foster an understanding of standards-based journalism as a practice that is designed to produce credible information.
- 5** Build and strengthen defenses against conspiracy theories and other forms of viral misinformation.
- 6** Teach students the personal and civic benefits of staying actively engaged with standards-based news.



The full report will be available at [newslit.org/news-literacy-in-america](https://newslit.org/news-literacy-in-america) on Oct. 21.