

Five Concepts of Media Literacy

media literacy: ability to “read,” analyze, evaluate, and interpret media messages in a variety of forms

medium: form of communication that carries information, entertainment, and advertisements to a mass audience; television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the Internet

message: basic idea or theme communicated in a certain medium; creators consider the techniques, presentation, and medium that will help them best convey their message to a specific audience

purpose: reason a media message was created, such as to entertain, inform, persuade, or make a profit

target audience: specific group of people the creators hope to reach; usually share certain characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnic background, values, and lifestyle

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It is important to be **media literate**—that is, to be able to “read,” analyze, and evaluate all kinds of media messages. The first step is to understand the five important concepts of media literacy.

FIVE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY

Concept 1: All media messages are constructed. Media messages are created by people—writers, directors, producers, designers, editors, and photographers—who decide what to include and what to omit from a message. Ask yourself:

- Who created the message and why?
- What information might have been omitted from this message?

Concept 2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules. Media creators use techniques to construct their messages, such as camera angles, lighting, and music. Understanding these techniques can help you appreciate the messages you see and make you aware of their influences. Ask yourself:

- Which medium is this message being delivered through?
- Which specific visual or sound techniques help communicate the message?
- What emotional appeals or persuasive techniques influence my response?

Concept 3: Different people experience the same media message differently. Just like readers interpret literary works in different ways, viewers interpret media messages differently. Personal factors such as age, education, occupation, and cultural background affect the way a person responds to a media message. Ask yourself:

- How do I react to this message? Am I persuaded, angered, or inspired?
- How might other people perceive this message? What can I learn from their responses?

Concept 4: Media messages are embedded with values and viewpoints. Media messages are constructed by people who have their own values and beliefs. Creators may purposely or unknowingly insert their views into their messages. Their biases and viewpoints may be evident in everything from the choice of subject matter to the presentation of information. Ask yourself:

- What biases might the creators have that could affect the information I receive?
- What ideas or values are communicated? What “image” is being sold? Status, a healthy lifestyle, beauty, popularity?
- What stereotypes or idealized images are evident?

Concept 5: Most media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power. Media messages may be intended to entertain, inform, or persuade. Above all, though, they are commodities that have been created to generate a profit. Ask yourself:

- Who is profiting from this message?
- What techniques are used to persuade viewers or maintain their interest?

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Directions: Editors and art directors design magazine covers to tempt consumers to buy their latest issues. Study the magazine shown and answer the questions.



1. What is the primary purpose of the message? Who is the target audience? _____

2. Why might the editors have chosen to feature these stories on the cover? Think about their effect on the target audience. _____

3. What techniques are used to construct and communicate this message? How might these techniques affect readers? _____

4. What ideas or values are being communicated? What image is being sold? Explain. _____
