Grade band expectations for news literacy

Overview

To effectively teach news literacy, school districts need a clear roadmap of how concepts, skills and dispositions develop as students progress through grades PreK-12. **The News Literacy Project** developed this living document to accompany our [Framework for Teaching News Literacy](#) as a guide of scaffolded skills, content knowledge and dispositions for schools and districts seeking to implement news literacy curriculums. It's designed to foster cross-curricular connections and complement already established benchmark requirements.

How to use this resource

For this overview document, expectations are outlined by grade band: K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12. To see the expectations for each grade band, read vertically. To see how expectations develop for each standard across grade bands, read horizontally. To see what each grade band has in common, read the throughlines for each standard.

By intentionally teaching students how to think like journalists, we can guide them toward healthy skepticism that will help them keep their bearings in today's overwhelming information landscape. We do this by developing five core news literacy standards in age-appropriate ways: Distinguish news from other types of information; acknowledge the importance of the First Amendment in American democracy and a free press to an informed public; apply understanding of how journalists use professional and ethical standards in their work to discern credible information and sources; demonstrate increased critical habits of mind, including effective verification skills and the ability to detect misinformation and faulty evidence; and express and exercise civic responsibility by seeking, sharing and producing credible information as effective participants in democracy.

This grade band expectations document is designed to support a districtwide approach to teaching news literacy. It can be used as is, but we expect that many practitioners will adapt it to better suit their needs. By nature, this document needs to be dynamic and evolve according to changes in the information environment along with your feedback. If you have ideas for ways we can make this resource stronger, please let us know at info@newslit.org.

JUMP TO: [STANDARD 1](#) [STANDARD 2](#) [STANDARD 3](#) [STANDARD 4](#) [STANDARD 5](#)

Special thanks

This resource builds on our [Framework for Teaching News Literacy](#), and was created with help from literacy experts and classroom practitioners. Considerable insight was gained from conversations with **Dr. Troy Hicks, Dr. Michael W. Smith and Dr. Jeffrey Wilhelm,** who provided feedback on multiple iterations of this document. A former middle school teacher, Hicks is now a professor of English and education at Central Michigan University, where he serves as chair of the Department of Teacher and Special Education and directs the Chippewa River Writing Project. Smith, a former high school English teacher for over a decade, is a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning in Temple University's College of Education and Human Development. After 15 years of teaching middle and high school reading and English, Wilhelm is now at Boise State University, where he is Distinguished Professor of Literacy and director of the Boise State Writing Project for promoting teacher leadership.

A group of engaged school librarians from the New Jersey Association of School Librarians generously workshopped the chart below. Our sincere gratitude to **Irene Hayden, Kristen Longstaff, Jill Mills, Sharon Nadelbach, Dee Venuto, Tara Cooper Weiss** and **Rebecca Zarabi.**

Key

The ⌖ symbol indicates the target learning indicator(s) for each learning category. Students who demonstrate mastery of the target indicator(s) meet the main goal(s) for that learning category. All other indicators scaffold or extend those targets.

Standard 1: Students distinguish news from other types of information and can recognize both traditional and nontraditional advertisements.

🎯 = Target indicator for learning category

A. PRIMARY PURPOSE

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Develop foundational knowledge of what news is and recognize that it is meant to inform. 2. Differentiate between news, entertainment and opinion. Begin using these vocabulary words in conversations. View suggested NLS.K-2.1.A implementation ideas.	1. Understand the primary purpose of news, opinion, entertainment and advertising. 2. Distinguish fact-based (checkable) statements from opinion-based statements. 3. Distinguish hard or straight news from opinion journalism; and identify different types of advertisements in print, broadcast and digital mediums. View suggested NLS.3-5.1.A implementation ideas.	1. 🎯**Analyze information according to primary purpose: to inform (news), to persuade (opinion), to amuse (entertainment), to sell/make money (advertising), to document (raw information) and to provoke (propaganda).** 2. Explore the distinction between opinion and propaganda. View suggested NLS.6-8.1.A implementation ideas.	1. Examine how language functions and meaning is created in different types of information: news, opinion, entertainment, advertising, raw information and propaganda. View suggested NLS.9-12.1.A implementation ideas.

B. BRANDED CONTENT

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
Begins in grades 6-8	*Begins in grades 6-8*	1. 🎯**Recognize branded and sponsored content and explore the role of influencers in advertising.** View suggested NLS.6-8.1.B implementation ideas.	1. Describe factors influencing marketing and analyze how sources monetize information. 2. Critique different approaches to labeling branded content and weigh ethical considerations for responsibly disclosing this type of advertising. View suggested NLS.9-12.1.B implementation ideas.

C. PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Begin to understand that creators follow different guidelines and use different techniques when they create different kinds of texts. View suggested NLS.K-2.1.C implementation ideas.	1. 🎯**Identify common guidelines and/or techniques creators follow and use to produce news, opinion, entertainment and advertising**. 2. Begin to notice that multimedia texts have complementary elements that generate the creator's desired meaning and reflect their primary purpose (i.e., to inform, persuade, mislead, etc.). View suggested NLS.3-5.1.C implementation ideas.	1. Analyze common guidelines and/or techniques creators follow and use, and how these suggest the primary purpose of each type of information. View suggested NLS.6-8.1.C implementation ideas.	1. Critique how a medium and an intended audience can influence and impact purpose, meaning and effect. View suggested NLS.9-12.1.C implementation ideas.

💡 **Throughlines:** Different types of information are created in different ways for different purposes, meanings and effects.

Standard 2: Students acknowledge the importance of the First Amendment in American democracy and a free press to an informed public.

🎯 = Target indicator for learning category

A. THE FIVE FREEDOMS

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Develop conceptual understanding of the First Amendment protections (petition, assembly, speech, religion and press). 2. Discuss how classroom rules can function to enhance and protect important freedoms and rights. Describe how students' rights and freedoms might be negatively affected by a 'rule-free' classroom. View suggested NLS.K-2.2.A implementation ideas.	1. Name the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment (petition, assembly, speech, religion and press). View suggested NLS.3-5.2.A implementation ideas.	1. 🎯**Describe how First Amendment freedoms protect and promote civic participation.** 2. Explore limitations of the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment (petition, assembly, speech, religion and press). 3. Explain why the free exchange of ideas and opinions is important in a democracy. View suggested NLS.6-8.2.A implementation ideas.	1. Explore how the five freedoms reinforce and sustain each other. For example, how the freedom of speech would be significantly diminished without the freedom of assembly, and vice versa. 2. Analyze First Amendment cases, and defend or criticize the Supreme Court's decision in each. View suggested NLS.9-12.2.A implementation ideas.

B. THE ROLE OF A FREE PRESS

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Recognize that *watchdogs* is another term for guard dogs, and that watchdogs bark when they hear a noise or notice something out of the ordinary to alert the people they protect. 2. Discuss how other people or organizations can act like or serve the same purpose as watchdogs. View suggested NLS.K-2.2.B implementation ideas.	1. Summarize the role that journalism plays in American democracy, particularly when it comes to being a watchdog and exposing wrongdoing. 2. Explore how creating and sharing credible information empowers individuals and invigorates a classroom by giving students a voice and allowing them to act on a shared set of facts. View suggested NLS.3-5.2.B implementation ideas.	1. 🎯**Explain how a free press promotes an informed public and government accountability.** 2. Describe the role investigative journalism plays in holding powerful people and institutions accountable to the public. 3. Explore iconic examples of investigative journalism and determine their impact. 4. Analyze and interpret editorial cartoons, and summarize how they have held people in power accountable. View suggested NLS.6-8.2.B implementation ideas.	1. Explain how the First Amendment empowers people to be citizen watchdogs. 2. Explore the role of local news and what can happen to communities in "news deserts." 3. 🎯**Compare the ways that different countries protect — or restrict — press freedoms**. View suggested NLS.9-12.2.B implementation ideas.

💡 **Throughlines:** The First Amendment protects responsible civic discourse and must be actively protected and maintained; watchdogs, including a free press, protect the public interest, and are a cornerstone of democracy; creating and sharing credible information empowers individuals and invigorates democracy.

> **Standard 3:** Students understand why professional and ethical standards are necessary to produce quality journalism, and they can apply understanding of those standards to discern credible information and sources for themselves.

🎯= Target indicator for learning category

A. STANDARDS OF QUALITY JOURNALISM

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Develop age-appropriate conceptual understanding of primary standards and principles of quality journalism (credible information): verification, accuracy, fairness, transparency and independence. View suggested NLS.K-2.3.A implementation ideas.	1. Deepen understanding of verification, accuracy, fairness, transparency and independence. 2. Investigate what bias means, and how it can be both intentional (conscious) or unintentional (unconscious) as well as how it can be minimized through processes and guidelines. 3. Develop age-appropriate conceptual understanding of balance and context. 4. Develop an elementary version of a credible news report and an opinion piece supported with facts. 5. 🎯**Discuss what makes something newsworthy (timely, important, interesting and unique), and why most things that happen every day aren't worthy of being covered.** View suggested NLS.3-5.3.A implementation ideas.	1. Compare the newsworthiness (a measure of how timely, important, interesting and unique a story is) of a group of dissimilar news stories. 2. 🎯**Differentiate between a credible news report and various forms of less reliable information — including partisan commentary, user-generated content and raw information — by detecting standards of quality journalism: verification (including multiple credible sources), fairness, avoidance of bias (impartiality), balance, context, accountability, transparency and independence.** 3. Introduce concepts of news media bias *types* (partisan, corporate, "big story," demographic and neutrality) and *forms* (absence of fairness and balance, framing, tone, story selection and flawed sourcing), as well as personal biases that audiences bring to news coverage. 4. Explain why it's important for communities and groups to trust news organizations to tell their stories accurately and fairly. View suggested NLS.6-8.3.A implementation ideas.	1. Appraise coverage of the same story from different news organizations and media outlets on the same date or in the same news cycle. 2. Differentiate hard or straight news reporting from opinion journalism. 3. 🎯**Differentiate between credible and questionable sources.** 4. Investigate how credible news organizations and journalists strive to adhere to a set of ethics and standards (such as the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics); and how the concern for accuracy and verification distinguishes journalism from other types of information. Discuss how these guiding principles can be seen in the end product. 5. Explain why news coverage that fails to fairly and accurately reflect the experiences and realities of communities and groups of people falls short of the standards of quality journalism. 6. 🎯**Investigate different types of potential news media bias (partisan, corporate, "big story," demographic and neutrality) and the forms they can take in coverage (absence of fairness and balance, framing, tone, story selection and flawed sourcing).** 7. Explain the importance of editorial independence and recognize that all news organizations require funding to operate. 8. Evaluate different ownership and revenue models of news organizations — including for-profit, nonprofit and government subsidized — and explain how transparency and independence should be protected in each. 9. Explore the uses, limitations and drawbacks of media bias rankings and charts. View suggested NLS.9-12.3.A implementation ideas.

💡 **Throughlines:**	Like all communities of professional practice, quality journalism aspires to rigorous standards and ethical guidelines. In journalism, these standards and guidelines are designed to produce fair, accurate and timely information about newsworthy issues and events for the public. No source of information is perfect, but people and organizations that demonstrate a commitment to verification and other journalistic ideals are significantly more likely to produce credible information than those who do not.

Standard 4: Students demonstrate increased critical habits of mind, including effective verification skills and the ability to detect misinformation and faulty evidence.

🎯 = Target indicator for learning category

A. VERIFYING CONTEXT AND AUTHENTICITY OF INFORMATION

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Using age-appropriate texts, demonstrate how the meaning of words can change when they are taken out of context. 2. Begin to identify the relationship between text and visuals/imagery and how this relationship can be corrupted when images and video are misrepresented by text in ways that change their meaning. View suggested NLS.K-2.4.A implementation ideas.	1. Demonstrate how the meaning of images, like words, can be changed when removed from their original context and re-presented in a false context. 2. Demonstrate how well-known names, brands or logos can be misused to fool people. 3. Understand the ways texts incorporate or reference other texts. 4. Define what authenticity means in different contexts (money, trading cards, etc.) and reflect on how information can be authentic or inauthentic. View suggested NLS.3-5.4.A implementation ideas.	1. Recognize the power of visual information and the ways it can be used together with text according to the creator's purpose (i.e., to inform, persuade, mislead, etc.). 2. Utilize disciplinary knowledge of how information is created and its different purposes to analyze and critique texts. 3. 🎯**Use news literacy skills such as "lateral reading," critical observation, "click restraint," web archives searches and reverse image searches to verify information.** 4. Describe how artificial intelligence can be used to fabricate information. View suggested NLS.6-8.4.A implementation ideas.	1. Deepen understanding of the relationship between stories, captions, claims and other text and their accompanying visuals by questioning a creator's motive and one's immediate, visceral reaction to visuals. 2. Deepen digital verification skills ("lateral reading", critical observation, image and video analysis, etc.). 3. Classify websites, apps and social media platforms that use personalization algorithms and their relationship to revenue. 4. Use filtering and advanced search functions to find relevant, credible information. 5. Recognize the advantages/uses of generative AI technologies and their potential for fabricating details, sources and visuals. View suggested NLS.9-12.4.A implementation ideas.

B. DETECTING AND ANALYZING MISINFORMATION AND ITS EFFECTS

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12+
1. In age-appropriate ways, recognize rumors and misinformation, and how they can cause harm. View suggested NLS.K-2.4.B implementation ideas.	1. Recognize that false information is created and propagated both unintentionally and intentionally. 2. 🎯**Define misinformation and explore some of the reasons people create and share it.** View suggested NLS.3-5.4.B implementation ideas.	1. 🎯**Recognize, define and differentiate different types of misinformation: satire, false context, impostor content, fabricated content and manipulated content.** 2. Acknowledge how misinformation can impact anyone, even those who don't believe a particular falsehood . 3. Discuss the differences between misinformation and disinformation and why making this distinction isn't always possible or necessary. 4. Determine the ways in which misinformation preys on our cognitive biases and satisfies psychological needs, and brainstorm ways to control or limit these vulnerabilities. View suggested NLS.6-8.4.A implementation ideas.	1. Deepen understanding of misinformation by categorizing examples by type and identifying logical fallacies. 2. Recognize misinformation tropes and patterns, and reflect on strategies for limiting their effectiveness and impact. 3. Illustrate the role that emotions, false evidence, logical fallacies and cognitive biases play in the creation and spread of misinformation. 4. Evaluate the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT and image generators. Outline the ways such tools could be used to help reduce the spread of misinformation and how bad actors might use these tools to create and reinforce false claims and narratives. 5. Explain how misinformation does personal and civic harm and why recognizing and debunking misinformation matters. View suggested NLS.9-12.4.A implementation ideas.

C. EVALUATING CLAIMS BASED ON STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE AND REASONING

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Make an argument and provide evidence and reasoning. View suggested NLS.K-2.4.C implementation ideas.	1. Analyze the effectiveness of different aspects of an argument (i.e., the clarity of its claim, the quality of its evidence, the explanation and validity of the link between the evidence and the claim, the way it addresses potential counterarguments). 2. Determine the relative effectiveness of different arguments on the same issue. View suggested NLS.3-5.4.C implementation ideas.	1. ◎**Differentiate between claims supported by solid evidence and sound reasoning and those that rely on faulty or inauthentic "evidence" and/or logical fallacies (including ad hominem, false dilemma, false equivalence, slippery slope and straw man).** View suggested NLS.6-8.4.C implementation ideas.	1. Distinguish between different levels of evidence. 2. ◎**Explain what conspiracy theories are and why many people find them appealing and compelling.** 3. Consider how AI technology signals a change in the nature of evidence. View suggested NLS.9-12.4.C implementation ideas.

💡 **Throughlines:**	Misinformation corrodes democracy by eroding trust in institutions and shared understandings of what is factual. This requires the public to evaluate claims based on an analysis of evidence and reasoning across sources in ways that correspond to expert practice. The ability to anticipate misinformation techniques and patterns employed by different actors, for various audiences in distinct contexts, requires verification skills and purposeful critical thinking.

Standard 5: Students express and exercise civic responsibility by seeking, sharing and producing credible information as effective participants in a democracy.

🎯 = Target indicator for learning category

A. SEEKING CREDIBLE INFORMATION

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Begin discussions of what information should be believed. Gather facts before coming to a decision. 2. Consider how life experiences (e.g., family traditions and where we live) inform thinking about the world. 3. Discuss the ways that false information is like pollution (e.g., that it affects others, can have a lasting impact, etc.). View suggested NLS.K-2.5.A implementation ideas.	1. Build on students' understanding of credibility by looking for attributes like accuracy, transparency, independence and impartiality. 2. Recognize that life and cultural experiences inform our thinking about the world. 3. Recognize the role algorithms play in platforms used to search for and find information. View suggested NLS.3-5.5.A implementation ideas.	1. 🎯**Demonstrate understanding that algorithms use data to personalize information and online experiences for individuals.** 2. Look for characteristics of credible information — including verification, fairness, transparency and independence. 3. Demonstrate how all human perceptions of objective reality are inherently limited due to life experiences and biases. 4. Actively design a healthy news diet composed of multiple credible sources. View suggested NLS.6-8.5.A implementation ideas.	1. Weigh the benefits and costs of "free information" in the attention economy, including the role that algorithms play in shaping it. 2. Recognize how implicit cognitive biases such as confirmation bias and motivated reasoning influence our perceptions of news and information, and shape how we understand and engage with others in civic discourse. 3. 🎯**Examine how personalization can reinforce personal biases, amplify mis/disinformation and create echo chambers.** 4. 🎯**Actively extend one's news and information diet to include high-quality opinions and alternative positions across multiple platforms, being aware of one's own perspective and biases while gathering facts, exploring the opinions of others and analyzing information.** 5. Recognize how personal backgrounds influence ways of knowing and that knowledge is created differently in different disciplines (medicine versus music, for example). 6. Look across data sources and base decisions on a pattern of credible evidence, understanding the strength and limitations of one's own and other's perspectives in choosing evidence and representing knowledge. View suggested NLS.9-12.5.A implementation ideas.

B. SHARING CREDIBLE INFORMATION

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Be responsible with information in age-appropriate ways, such as avoiding repeating things that aren't true, helpful, necessary or kind; exercise caution in what is repeated or shared because of its effect on others. 2. Engage in productive conversations and classroom community building. 3. Develop a concern for one's information reputation by taking care of what you share or repeat with others.	1. Critically consume and share information. 2. Reinforce what makes a healthy democratic community and consider how information creation and sharing habits affect a person's reputation. 3. Continue thinking about and practicing what makes a productive conversation, such as asking genuine questions to check for understanding, respectfully acknowledging and responding to other viewpoints, and building on others' comments.	1. Begin to anticipate the effects of sharing a piece of information and make conscious choices about whether and how to respond to social media posts, including whether to ignore, like, reshare or add context to them in some way. 2. Use news literacy skills to justify positions and see the value of others' positions. 3. 🎯**Engage in agreed-upon rules for civic dispositions, including intellectual humility (an openness to being wrong) and entering contentious conversations in good faith**	1. 🎯**Demonstrate the ability to responsibly share information (and be metacognitive about one's purpose for sharing or not sharing).** 2. Reinforce and extend conversation habits and values developed in earlier years to recognize the value of engaging with sincere, well-reasoned opinions, including those with whom you disagree, in order to uphold standards for living together in a diverse democracy. View suggested NLS.9-12.5.B implementation ideas.

		(honestly pursuing and reflecting accurate, fact-based beliefs). These rules should also acknowledge how bad faith tactics — such as snark, sarcasm and ad hominem attacks — derail and deteriorate civic conversations.

C. PRODUCING CREDIBLE INFORMATION

K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12
1. Tell stories in ways that recognize the importance of accuracy. 	1. In age-appropriate ways, begin to explore the information environment and strategies to push back on misinformation. 2. Recognize that the standards and principles of quality journalism can be used by anyone to produce information that others take seriously. 3. Incorporate standards such as accuracy, transparency and impartiality in oral and written compositions. 	1. Discover the role everyone can play in documenting events and determine some of the limitations of raw information. 2. Use the standards of quality journalism when developing compositions of information to share with others or when talking about events. 	1. Identify ways to publish and amplify individual compositions, such as social media posts, images, videos and blogs. Be aware of how language and images can be used to amplify or minimize personal biases. 2. Follow copyright laws and fair-use guidelines. 3. 🎯**Demonstrate understanding of the benefits and limitations of citizen watchdogs.** 4. Respond to news coverage that falls short of the aspirational standards of quality journalism by providing specific, actionable feedback.

💡 **Throughlines:** Building and sustaining healthy democratic communities requires individuals to seek, share and create credible information; to hold news media accountable for their coverage; and to minimize the effects of misinformation on public discourse.