

## Key Takeaways: Ten Media Literacy Lessons from *What the Fact?!*

**1. Use precise language.** Terms like *fake news* obscure how misinformation really spreads, and who benefits. Recognizing the full spectrum of false and misleading information and determining which you're dealing with can help you avoid falling for falsehoods that take less obvious forms and better understand how to stop their spread. *For more advice on using precise language, see **chapter 1**.*

"Specific terms are not only going to make us sound much smarter but they can help us better understand who created the false information, who was spreading it, and why."

**2. Recognize common strategies used to spread misinformation.** Scholars have developed a classification system for techniques of science denial and the spread of disinformation called the FLICC taxonomy. FLICC stands for fake experts, logical fallacies, impossible expectations, cherry picking, and conspiracy theories. Learning about these techniques is the first step to debunking disinformation. *For more advice on using the FLICC taxonomy, see **chapter 2**.*

"Digging into five key techniques used to make us believe lies helps us have those essential Aha! moments when we spot these techniques in action."

**3. Acknowledge your bias.** The work of identifying bias in the information we encounter starts with interrogating our own biases. Everyone has biases, and they can even serve useful purposes! However, unacknowledged biases can make us much more susceptible to misinformation, and lead to harmful results for ourselves and others. Be mindful of questioning information that confirms your beliefs as often as you question information that surprises you. *For more advice on acknowledging bias, see **chapter 2**.*

"Understanding and acknowledging our biases can protect us from falling into traps of simplistic thinking."

**4. Do your own fact-checking.** When you learn something new, ask where that information came from, and try to trace it as far back as you can. Developing a fact-checking habit will help you identify where your knowledge and beliefs are coming from, and can strengthen your confidence in your ability to sort fact from fiction. *For more advice on fact-checking, see **chapter 3**.*

"Every chunk of data has its own origin story."

**5. Build an intentional news diet.** Consider what you want to get out of the news, and how you can do that. Lean into sources you trust, while also seeking out other voices to avoid an echo chamber. *For more advice on healthy news consumption, see **chapter 3**.*

"Designing your own media diet gives you nourishing doses of information and entertainment and puts a lid on distractions so that you're not as tempted to tap every time your phone pings or an alert pops up on some screen somewhere. It also means your worldview is challenged, because you are designing a diet that exposes you to different perspectives, and this can gently guide you out of your comfort zone."

**6. Pay attention to who is telling the stories in your news diet.** The journalism industry, and especially its leaders, are disproportionately white, cisgender, heterosexual, male, and

able-bodied. Journalists' identities and experiences shape which stories get told, and how. Seek out a diversity of storytellers to get a more well-rounded perspective. *For more information on diversity and representation in journalism, see **chapter 3**.*

"We all experience the world a certain way, are treated in different ways, and have varied backgrounds and life experiences, and if many different lived experiences were represented in the rooms where news decisions are made, journalism would better reflect the lives of the people who consume it."

**7. Pull back the curtain on social media.** Be mindful of how social media algorithms work, who designs them, how they profit, and how your mental health, privacy, and community are affected as a result. Major tech companies like to keep their practices and algorithmic details secret, but remembering that there are human beings and companies with their own set of interests curating your online experience can lead you to ask questions about the content that appears before you, and what perspectives might be missing. *For more advice on navigating social media platforms, see **chapter 4**.*

"[An] algorithm might run on a machine, but it was programmed by people who coded it to decide how to order content by the likelihood that you'll enjoy and engage with it and stay on the platform for hours."

**8. Take control of your social media experience.** Pay attention to how much time you spend on different social media platforms, and how they make you feel. Make a plan to budget your time on social media based on your observations, and consider exploring platforms beyond the biggest, most profit-hungry ones. *For more advice on controlling your social media experience, see **chapter 4**.*

"Social media has firmly planted its feet in our lives. It's not going anywhere, and it offers amazing connections and information, but it's important that you control its effects on your time, mood, and health."

**9. Practice active listening techniques.** If you want to debunk misinformation or engage with a person who disagrees with you about a controversial issue, listening is one of the most powerful things you can do. It gives you a better chance of understanding where they're coming from, encourages them to identify inconsistencies in their own thinking, and preserves your relationship in the face of conflict. *For more advice on having healthy disagreements and debunking misinformation in conversation, see **chapter 5**.*

"Over time, broad questions and deep listening can help soften tension and help people understand that they are not under attack."

**10. Remember that you are the solution.** In the face of the many forms of false information and bias swirling around in the world and in our brains, it can be tempting to tune out and become a total skeptic. With so many pitfalls laying in wait, why venture forth into the sea of information? But keep in mind that good information is out there for trained truthseekers! In fact, researchers estimate that only 0.15 percent of the news people in the U.S. consume is actually fake (p. 143). Armed with your critical thinking skills and an open mind, you will be able to make better decisions, understand other people more deeply, and engage in your community more effectively. Every time you use and share these skills, you are combating falsehoods and stereotypes in your online and IRL communities, and creating a healthier information ecosystem for us all.