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# This elections season, let's not repeat the same news literacy mistakes

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"News literacy is the ability to identify what information you can trust, share, and act on to become a better-informed and more engaged participant in the civic life of your community and our country," writes Silva.

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In the weeks following the 2020 presidential election, many of us watched from the sidelines as [misinformation](#) from political figures, social media feeds, podcasts and pundits stoked anger and suspicion that someone had tampered with ballots and voting machines. These false beliefs about a "stolen election" took root, spread and grew into a movement that led to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol. Despite overwhelming, verifiable evidence to the contrary, those beliefs persist today.

With another presidential contest likely featuring the same two candidates, it's hardly surprising that election rumors and misinformation already are spreading, with former President [Donald Trump urging crowds to "guard the vote"](#) at polling places in Philadelphia, Detroit and Atlanta.

Ahead of the elections and during [National News Literacy Week](#), we can each take important steps to ensure our emotions and beliefs are not being manipulated by misinformation. If we are aware of and practice [news literacy](#) skills, we can ensure our information is credible and comes from reputable sources. By doing so, we can take action to avoid a repeat of Jan. 6.

News literacy is the ability to identify what information you can trust, share, and act on to become a better-informed and more engaged participant in the civic life of your community and our country. It teaches you how to navigate our challenging and complex information landscape, helping you learn *how* to think about the information you consume, not *what* to think about it. News literacy gives you the tools and skills to evaluate the credibility of news and other information and determine the quality and reliability of what you consume. It also explores the processes and standards that journalists follow to report the news as fairly and accurately as possible.

News is meant to inform you; credible, standards-based news does not take a stance on issues. It gives you the who, what, when, where and why and provides that information from multiple, credible sources with an emphasis on fairness and accuracy. Unfortunately, a great deal of information out there might *look* like news but, instead, is meant to persuade or influence you, such as [punditry](#). Opinion journalism should follow ethical standards, like providing evidence for claims, presenting logical arguments and frequently acknowledging conflicting views. Opinion pieces that cherry-pick data, leave out important context or use logical fallacies are not quality journalism —they are misleading and unfair.

No one wants to be misled. To make sure the news we are getting shows the full story, consider the following:

- Does the story include multiple sources or experts who can provide the relevant details about what took place?
- When possible, are there links to related reports, studies, data, video or audio that can add context?
- Is the story reported fully, including all key information, and with the proper context to provide a clear understanding?
- Have the details in the story been fact-checked and verified?
- Are multiple sides of the issue reported to ensure fairness without giving undue weight to one side or the other?
- Was the piece reported in a dispassionate manner that avoids bias?
- Is the newsroom transparent about past errors, and does it note corrections on its stories?

All of these are essential factors to consider before acting on information.

Differences of opinion are valuable and essential to the marketplace of ideas (which the [Free Speech Center](#) at Middle Tennessee State University [says](#), “refers to the belief that the test of the truth or acceptance of ideas depends on their competition with one another and not on the opinion of a censor.”) But truth is supported by facts, and facts are supported by evidence.

Ordinary voters can't control what politicians and pundits say, but we don't have to subject ourselves to another election cycle marred by misinformation meant to confuse and anger us. We can use news literacy skills to find credible information and discern facts from fiction. We can push back on falsehoods and fake claims. With news literacy, we can reclaim our power to determine the truth.