

# Media Literacy



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EVALUATION PURPOSES ONLY**

ELA 922

Fresno Pacific University

## Introduction to Media Literacy

Media literacy is a set of skills that anyone can learn. Just as literacy is the ability to read and write, media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media messages of all kinds. These are essential skills in today's world. Today, many people get most of their information through complex combinations of text, images and sounds. We need to be able to navigate this complex media environment, to make sense of the media messages that bombard us every day, and to express ourselves using a variety of media tools and technologies.

Media literate youth and adults are better able to decipher the sometimes complex messages we receive from television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, signs, packaging, marketing materials, video games, recorded music, the Internet and other forms of media. They can understand how these media messages are constructed, and discover how they create meaning – usually in ways hidden beneath the surface. People who are media literate can also create their own media, becoming active participants in our media culture.

*Media literacy skills can help children, youth, and adults:*

- Understand how media messages create meaning
- Identify who created a particular media message
- Recognize what the media maker wants us to believe or do
- Name the "tools of persuasion" used
- Recognize bias, spin, misinformation and lies
- Discover the part of the story that's not being told
- Evaluate media messages based on our own experiences, beliefs and values
- Create and distribute our own media messages
- Become advocates for change in our media system

Media literacy education helps to develop critical thinking and active participation in our media culture. The goal is to give youth and adults greater freedom by empowering them to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media.

*In schools:*

Educational standards in many states - in language arts, social studies, health and other subjects - include the skills of accessing, analyzing and evaluating information found in media. These are media literacy skills, though the standards may not use that term. Teachers know that students like to examine and talk about their own media, and they've found that media literacy is an engaging way to explore a wide array of topics and issues.

## Textbook Chapter Questions

Now that you have read a few select articles about Media Literacy, and have a bit more background on its meaning and significance, I will ask you to scan through the required textbook for this course: Shirley Biagi's excellent text - *Media / Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media*.

You will find, over the next several pages, questions for each of the sixteen chapters of the course text. After scanning the text, I ask that you **select and respond to your choice of any nine** of the sixteen chapter questions that interest you. You are certainly free to respond to additional chapter questions, but responding to at least nine is required.

If you are able to express your replies thoughtfully and succinctly in three or four paragraphs, that is perfectly fine; there is no minimum length requirement, as long as you've conveyed your thoughts. In some instances I am asking for your perspective, so there is no 'right or wrong' answer.

I am not concerned with formatting and style (although if you chose to hand write, please make sure your responses are legible); I would rather you focus your attention on content. I am interested in reading your thoughts, conclusions, opinions, and in some cases, arguments, as you apply critical thinking skills throughout the course.

You may either write directly on the workbook pages then submit a photocopy, or word process your responses and return a printout.

After completion of the textbook chapter questions, you will be creating lesson plans for four of the eight media exercises, followed by four (what I call) textbook projects.

Remember, if at any time questions arise I am readily available to assist you (e-mail is preferred); that's why I'm here! I value your input, so at the close of the course is a brief evaluation form that I would ask you to complete and return. Historically the majority of changes made to my courses are a result of your feedback. Thanks, in advance, for your assistance in helping me provide you with the best distance learning experience!

### **Chapter 1 - Mass Media and Everyday Life**

On page 15 of the text, Biagi lists six factors that have effected the economic alignment of the newspaper and broadcast industries. In your opinion, which one do you see as most significant, and why?



## Media Exercise 2: Aural Communication

One very strong (and often overlooked) aspect of communication is aural, or communicating by the use of sounds. Verbal language aside, the world is full of sounds which send us signals and give us messages - a baby's cry, a barking dog, the siren of a police car or ambulance responding to an emergency, are all examples of aural communication. Music also has strong emotional power. We have learned to associate certain types of music with specific feelings or emotions. The screeching strings from Psycho or the love theme from Romeo and Juliet are two fine examples.

As with symbols, the interpretation of aural messages is dictated by cultural exposure. In the early part of this century, when radio dramas held the interest of listeners across the country, people learned a new language - the language of sound. The spoken word, along with music and sound effects, created entire universes within the imagination of the radio listener. Slamming doors, cars speeding away, the shuffling of a deck of cards, were woven together to create a mood within a story which all listeners could follow and enjoy.

On the DVD supplied with your materials are snippets of various sounds and music clips. Using these as a resource (adding or creating others, tailored to your grade level / students, if you wish) develop a lesson plan appropriate to your teaching situation with the following goal:

***Students will listen to and identify the sounds, then describe the associated meanings or feelings which they convey.***

Possible activities or discussion topics:

Identify each sound played.

Why are you able (or not able) to identify what is being played?

What visual or imaginary image does each sound bring to mind?

Is your mental image of what creates each sound similar to that of your classmates?

Do the sounds take on different meanings as the order of play is varied?

What factors determine the mood the sound conveys?

How does pitch and speed affect the meaning of each sound?

What idea or story can you write using the sounds as a guide?

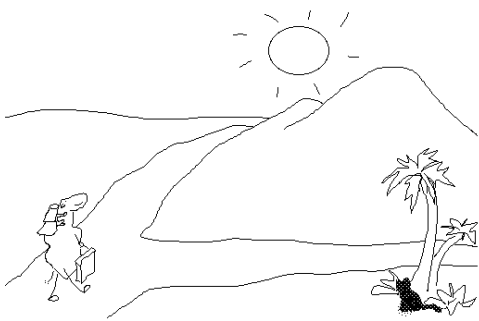
What does each section of music communicate to you or make you feel?

What kind of image does the music bring to mind?

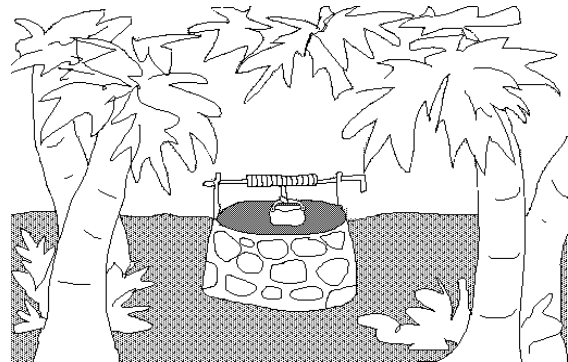
## Storyboards

The process of planning out picture statements on paper is called *storyboarding*. On individual cards, or several to a page, sketches are drawn to represent what will later be photographed. Each sketch represents a single picture statement, and uses a type of shot described on the previous pages. Every scene shown in a movie or on television is planned. The person pointing the camera at a subject either had express directions on what and how to photograph the subject, or the photographer used his or her expertise to take the picture.

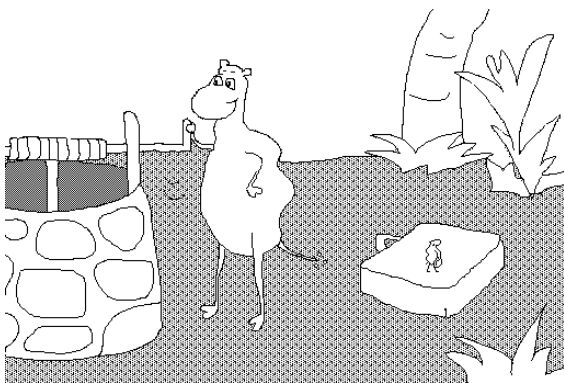
A director usually decides what picture statement will be expressed, and what elements should be in any given shot to convey that idea. He then tells the cameraperson what each picture should look like. In the case of commercials, large committees can spend days deciding exactly how each picture statement should look. Even with live news and sports, there are 'standard' ways to photograph the action; you may have noticed that all network football or baseball games look about the same. With thousands (usually millions) of dollars being spent to attract and maintain audience interest, most producers will opt for the type of picture statement we have all seen many times before.



Long shot, desert under the hot sun.  
A camel walks up the road.



Medium shot of a well in the oasis.



Close-up of the camel getting  
a bucket of water.



Extreme close-up of camel  
drinking water.

## Media Exercise 3: Storyboarding

On the following pages are examples of storyboards and storyboard elements. Presented are three different formats of storyboard pages of varying complexity. Feel free to copy and distribute these as handouts. The storyboard figures used to create your storyboards may be copied, cut out, or traced into storyboard frames. Using these storyboards as a resource (adding or creating others better suited to your students / classroom, if you wish), develop a lesson plan appropriate to your teaching situation with the following goal:

***Students will express a simple progression of ideas visually, using storyboards.***

By learning how to storyboard, students will develop an understanding of visual communication using the same tools employed by film and television studios. After familiarizing your students with this process, they can better understand the impact and messages presented to them in any given program. Virtually all films and television shows go through a storyboarding process, either on paper or in the director's mind.

### Possible activities or discussion topics:

Use comics or the funny pages as examples.

Make a storyboard of your morning routine.

Make a storyboard of a scene from a TV show or movie.

Make a storyboard of how a machine works.

Make a storyboard illustrating a song or poem.

Make a storyboard of a newspaper article.

Do all shows or types of shows need to be storyboarded?

Are news events and other 'live' television' events storyboarded?

Who usually does the storyboarding for a program?

Should the television cameraman look at the storyboards?



## Media Exercise 8: Stereotypes on Television

Just as television shows the world to be unnaturally violent, it is also atypical in other ways. Many stories revolve around male characters (they typically outnumber women characters, 3:1), and 'heroes' are oftentimes caucasian males. More than any other mass medium, television is constrained by time. Most shows are less than 23 minutes long (commercials taking up the remainder) and must tell a complete story within that amount of time; there is little opportunity to develop characters. Quite often, characters are stereotypes, quickly and easily identified as a 'bad' drug dealer, a 'ditzy' blonde, or a 'neurotic' salesperson. With this in mind, develop a lesson plan appropriate to your teaching situation with the following goal:

***Students should be able to identify stereotypes on television.***

Possible activities or discussion topics:

Television influences our feelings about, and knowledge of ourselves and our thoughts and feelings about others. Can you identify subtle as well as obvious characteristics about television characters?

Compare and contrast character(s) from television with those from film, literature and real life.

Do news and other 'real' programs necessarily portray people objectively?

Count the number of males and females in your class. What programs, if any, have a similar ratio?

How has a specific character on television dealt with issues of prejudice?

Are any individuals your students know identical in actions, morals, standards, beliefs and values, as a character portrayed on television?

What do people in commercials look like? Do they seem different than people on other television shows? Or More importantly, different than actual people in real life?

How can you tell a 'bad guy' on television? Is it the way he/she looks, acts, dresses, moves or speaks?

What types of employment do most characters on television have? Do your students know anyone with the same job(s)?

Do characters on television usually get what they want? Do they have the same wishes, hopes and desires as you?



## Textbook Projects

Now comes the fun! The remainder of the course asks that you **complete any four textbook projects** which relate to the information contained in the text.

These projects can either be for your benefit, or an activity you might consider sharing with your students - the choice is yours. Below are *suggestions* but if you wish to substitute original ideas, please feel free; in fact I encourage you to do so.

Be creative and use your imagination to develop activities that are beneficial to your grade level and / or teaching situation ... stimulate your critical thinking skills!

1. Locate and submit articles which report on the same event from an online news source, a magazine, and a daily (non-online) newspaper. Compare the three. In what ways do you feel they differ? Why?
2. Along the same line as the suggestion for Project 1, compare the reporting of a specific event by two (or more) major television networks (ie CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, PBS, CNN, BBC, CNBC). Can you draw any conclusions from your comparison of coverage, analysis, newscaster style, etc.?
3. Research the 3 classifications of magazines as presented in the text. Visit newsstands at various locales (supermarket, bookstore, library) in your city to locate, then list, as many examples of each of the 3 classifications as you can find. Does the inventory of each location vary? If so, what factor(s) do you see as the reason(s)?
4. Familiarize yourself with the various radio formats, as cited by the author. List the stations available to you in your area, sorted by format. What conclusions can you draw from the data you've gathered?
5. After watching network television for an hour in the morning, an hour in the afternoon, and an hour in the evening, note what types of commercials for what types of products are aired at each time of day. Analyze your data. (Of all the suggestions listed here, this one seems to be the popular favorite among those who have taken the course in the past!)