

Analyze Media Messages

How can we get better at reading, analyzing, and evaluating the information around us?

Media is another word for any form of mass communication, or communication aimed at reaching large numbers of people. Books are a form of media. So are movies. And so are songs, commercials, podcasts, magazines, advertisements, and websites. Media messages surround us every day, but not all messages are created with the same level of quality and accuracy. For this reason, it's important to learn how to analyze these messages, determine how reliable they are, and think critically about how they influence our actions and decisions.

Here are five key questions that you can ask to help you evaluate any media message you encounter.

Question	Why It Matters
1. Who created this message?	Knowing who created a message can help you understand the purpose(s) of that message. If a politician is running an ad on TV, the purpose is to win your vote. If a studio debuts a new movie at the theater, the purpose is to entertain you <i>and</i> make money. If you can't tell who created the message you're looking at, that could be a sign to be cautious.
2. What techniques are used to grab and hold my attention?	<p>Media messages use many different techniques to influence you. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Music can affect your feelings.• Bold colors can draw attention to key ideas or a product name.• Humor can encourage you to remember and want to purchase a product.• Dramatic headlines that include words like <i>shocking</i> or <i>mind-blowing</i> can make you more likely to read a news story. <p>Recognizing these techniques can help you be more aware of how they influence your decisions, beliefs, and actions.</p>

<p>3. How might different people understand this message differently?</p>	<p>People may experience the same message—like a song—and walk away with very different ideas about its meaning. That’s because we all experience media differently, based on how we feel in that moment, on our past, and on our values. If you’ve never owned a cat, for example, you might not find a meme about cat behavior as funny as someone who has. It is important to understand why you react as you do, and why others might react differently to the same message.</p>
<p>4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are reflected in—<i>or omitted from</i>—this message?</p>	<p>All media messages are created by people with their own ideas and opinions about the world. Those media creators make decisions about what to include—and what <u>not</u> to include in their messages. They may do this to focus their messages or to persuade you to adopt their point of view. They may not even realize how their biases and opinions affect the information they include. As you view any media message, ask yourself: How is the information included influencing my viewpoint?</p>
<p>5. Why is this message being sent?</p>	<p>Finally, consider why this media message exists at all. Is it to inform you of something? To persuade you to believe a certain idea or to buy a specific product? Is it merely to entertain you? Remember that a media message can have more than one purpose. Think about that blockbuster movie designed to entertain, promote a message, and make money, all at the same time! If there are multiple purposes, which one seems most important to the creators? How can you tell?</p>

Your Choice: Analyze a Media Message

Pick one of the forms of media below. Then use the graphic organizer on the next page to analyze the media message and evaluate its effect on you.

1. Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Search for a public service announcement, also called a PSA, on a topic of public health and safety. Suggestions for possible topics include the importance of wearing a seatbelt or the dangers of smoking or drinking and driving. Watch the PSA and evaluate how it communicates its message. What techniques are used to persuade or inform?

2. Movie Trailer

Find a trailer for a movie you've watched recently. Think about how the trailer portrayed the movie. Did it make the movie seem scarier, funnier, or more exciting than the movie turned out to be? Why might the trailer have highlighted the parts of the movie it did? What impression of the movie did you get from watching the trailer?

3. Comedy Sketch

Go online to find a comedy sketch from your favorite show or comedy group. What is the main purpose of the skit? Is it solely to entertain or does it want you to consider other topics as well? What techniques are used to make you laugh? What techniques are used to make you think?

Media Selected: _____

Question	My Notes and Observations
1. Who created this message?	
2. What techniques are used to grab and hold my attention?	
3. How might different people understand this message differently?	
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are reflected in— <i>or omitted from</i> —this message?	
5. Why is this message being sent?	

Conclusions on Media Message: _____
