**Misinformation & Media Literacy:**

Navigating the COVID-19 “Infodemic”

Presentation Guide

Overview

As misinformation about COVID-19 proliferates online, and as remote learning and social distancing cause students to spend even more of their time online, media literacy skills have taken on greater importance. NewsGuard has created a suite of plug-and-play resources for educators to teach a media literacy lesson through the lens of COVID-19 misinformation:

* **PowerPoint slides:**
	+ Part 1: Coronavirus Conspiracies & Other Health Hoaxes (20-30 minutes)
	+ Part 2: Evaluating Sources (20-30 minutes)
	+ Part 3: Evaluating Claims (10-15 minutes)
	+ Part 4: Exercises (20-30 minutes in class or assign as homework)
* **Slide guide**
* **Exercise documents**
* **Vocabulary supplement**

Outcomes

These resources are aligned with the [Common Core anchor standards](http://www.corestandards.org/) and the [International Society for Technology in Education](https://www.iste.org/standards/for-students) (ISTE) standards for technology use:

* **Research**
	+ “Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
	+ “Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.” — ISTE 3b
* **Writing**
	+ “Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8
* **Technology**
	+ “Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6
	+ “Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.” — ISTE 6a

Suggested grade levels:

This guide is designed for a high school audience (9th - 12th grade) but may also be used for middle school (6th - 8th grade) and university-level classes.

Slide outline

**Slide 1: Title slide (Misinformation & Media Literacy: Navigating the COVID-19 “Infodemic”)**

* Begin by introducing to students that they will be learning about **misinformation**, especially related to the coronavirus, and they will develop skills to avoid these hoaxes.
* Define **misinformation**: “false information”
* Outline the rest of the slides:
	+ Part 1 introduces students to health misinformation generally, and false claims about coronavirus specifically
	+ Part 2 teaches students how to evaluate the credibility of sources online
	+ Part 3 explains how students should evaluate health claims online, incorporating source evaluation skills
	+ Part 4 puts these skills to the test and has students evaluate sources on their own

**Slide 2: Part 1: Coronavirus Conspiracies & Other Health Hoaxes**

* Explain that in this section, we will introduce the topic of health misinformation generally, and false claims about coronavirus specifically. We’ll talk about where and how far it spreads, and we will discuss some of the main false claims about coronavirus.

**Slide 3: Let’s Take a Poll**

* **Discuss:** Pose these questions to students and have them volunteer to share answers.
* Optional follow-up question for volunteers: “*Why* do you consult these sources? *How* do you choose them?”

**Slide 4: When you see health news on social media or in a Google search, all the sources look the same.**

* Pose these questions to students to get them thinking about the different types of people and organizations that publish information online, some more credible than others.
* Reinforce to students that they cannot trust everything they read online, even if they see it on social media or Google.
* **Example:** in the image on the right, Google recommended results from “Mercola.com” — a site that has published health misinformation — over MayoClinic.com — A credible site of a world-renowned hospital in Minnesota.

**Slide 5: Which sources would you trust? (Discuss)**

* **Discuss:** Go through each health website URL one-by-one and have students say whether they think it’s a trustworthy source or not. Ask volunteers to explain their reasoning (credible or not) for each source. The point of this exercise is to teach students that just because a website sounds credible, we can’t rely solely on the website name to determine whether it’s a reliable source (unless it’s a website we already know to be reliable).

**Slide 6: Which sources would you trust? (Answers)**

* Reveal which sources are credible and which are unreliable and compare that with what the students guessed.
	+ Medicine-Today.net: **Unreliable**.
		- NewsGuard’s description: “An anonymously run website that promotes alternative medicine and has published false and misleading claims about cancer treatments.”
	+ MedicineNet.com: **Reliable**.
		- NewsGuard’s description: “A website providing news and information about health and wellness for a general readership.”
	+ Vaccination.co.uk: **Unreliable.**
		- NewsGuard’s description: “A blog about vaccinations, run by a London chiropractor, that frequently publishes false or misleading claims.”
	+ Patient.info: **Reliable.**
		- NewsGuard’s description: “A health website that enlists doctors and other medical experts to provide information about well-being, illnesses, treatments, and drugs.”
	+ HealthyChildren.org: **Reliable.**
		- NewsGuard’s description: “A website run by the American Academy of Pediatrics that provides medical and child care advice to parents.”
	+ ChildrensHealthDefense.org: **Unreliable.**
		- NewsGuard’s description: “The website of an anti-vaccine nonprofit chaired by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., which publishes false and unproven scientific and health information.”
* **Takeaways**:
	+ We can’t rely solely on the website name to determine whether it’s a reliable source (unless it’s a website we already know to be reliable).
	+ Point out to students that Medicine-Today.net and MedicineNet.com sound very similar, but they vary greatly in their reliability.
	+ Students may have made credibility assessments based on the different domain endings (“.net,” “.org,” “.info,” etc.), but they should realize they should never rely solely on a URL or website domain ending when evaluating the credibility of a source. One “.org” site was reliable, but the other “.org” site wasn’t. And the site with the funny “.info” ending is very reliable.

**Slide 7: The internet is full of health misinformation**

* 11% of the websites people rely on for news and information are spreading bad health advice and false claims
* **Discussion questions**: Have you ever read health information online that you thought was suspicious? What was it? Why did you think it was suspicious?

**Slide 8: Health misinformation is popular on social media**

* People often share articles, videos, etc. from websites that publish bad health information.
* NewsGuard looked at the reliable health information websites that are most popular on social media, and looked at how much “engagement” they get. They compared that to the “engagement” of the top-performing unreliable health information websites.
	+ **Takeaway**: unreliable health information sites are much more popular on social media than reliable ones, so it is important to be extra cautious when you read health advice on social media.

**Slide 9: The Coronavirus “Infodemic”**

* Define Infodemic
* **Discussion questions**: Have you felt overwhelmed by information about the coronavirus? Where are you getting the information? Have you heard anything about the coronavirus that you knew or found out later was false?

**Slide 10: The top COVID-19 myths: False claims about its origin**

* NewsGuard has tracked the myths circulating about coronavirus. Many of the popular myths promote unsubstantiated theories about where the disease came from.
* **Myth 1:** “The COVID-19 virus was stolen out of a Canadian lab by Chinese spies.”
	+ **Full Debunk**: While two Chinese scientists were escorted from a Winnipeg lab last July, the Public Health Agency of Canada later told Canada’s public broadcaster that the Chinese scientists were asked to leave due to an “administrative manner,” described by Canadian police as a “policy breach” that posed no danger to public safety. The Public Health Agency spokesperson said that any claim that the Chinese scientists were spies—or that their work had to do with coronavirus—is “misinformation.”
		- **In short**: The Chinese scientists left the Canadian lab for administrative reasons. Their work had nothing to do with the coronavirus.
* **Myth 2:** “A group funded by Bill Gates patented the COVID-19 virus.”
	+ **Full Debunk**: The group in question — the Pirbright Institute (a biological research institution in England) — has indeed accepted funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. But the patent it holds covers a separate strain of coronavirus that only affects chickens, not humans. “Pirbright does not currently work with human coronaviruses,” the institute said in a January 2020 post on its website responding to the patent conspiracy theory. This means the Institute does no work on the COVID-19 virus.
		- **In short**: The group in question did receive funding from the Gates Foundation — a philanthropic organization — but its work does not have anything to do with the COVID-19 virus.
* **Myth 3:** “5G cell phone technology is linked to the coronavirus outbreak.”
	+ **Full Debunk**: Opponents of 5G mobile technology have claimed for years that it causes health problems in humans including cancer and radiation poisoning, despite a complete lack of any scientific evidence to back this up. In an April 2020 article from the BBC, Dr. Simon Clarke, a microbiology professor at the University of Reading, described claims that 5G either transmits the virus, or suppresses the immune system, thus making people more vulnerable to it, as “complete rubbish.” A March 2020 report from the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection — a nonprofit institute that studies mobile technology — found no evidence that 5G networks posed a risk to human health.
		- **In short**: Scores of scientists and public health institutions have repeatedly found that 5G technology does not pose a risk to human health.
* **Takeaways**: These myths are a problem because they wrongly blame different people, countries, and technologies for the virus outbreak.

**Slide 11: The top COVID-19 myths: Phony cures**

* The other main category of misinformation about coronavirus consists of fake, unsubstantiated cures for the disease.
* **Myth 1:** “Colloidal silver can cure COVID-19.”
	+ **Full Debunk**: Colloidal silver is a liquid substance containing silver particles. Using it is not known to treat any medical conditions, according to the National Institutes of Health. Instead, colloidal silver has been known to cause a condition called argyria, a permanent bluish-gray discoloration of the skins, nails, and gums. “Colloidal silver is not safe or effective for treating any disease or condition,” according to the Food and Drug Administration.
		- **In short**: Colloidal (liquid) silver does not treat any disease, and, in fact, the government has warned that it can cause health problems.
* **Myth 2:** “Garlic can cure COVID-19.”
	+ **Debunk**: The World Health Organization has stated, “Garlic is a healthy food that may have some antimicrobial properties. However, there is no evidence from the 2020 outbreak that eating garlic has protected people from the new strain of coronavirus.”
* **Myth 3**: “High doses of vitamin C have been proven to be an effective treatment for COVID-19.”
	+ **Full Debunk**: While a clinical trial is underway in China to test whether a high-dose vitamin C regimen is effective against the new strain of coronavirus, the claim that it is a proven treatment for COVID-19 is not supported by scientific evidence. Vitamin C has some marginal benefits for the common cold, such as reducing the duration of symptoms if it is taken before catching the cold, but those benefits can be achieved with a diet that includes 200 milligrams of vitamin C, according to Harvard Health Publishing. The daily dosage being tested in the Chinese trial is 60 times higher.
		- **In short:** Scientific studies are underway to determine if there is any truth to this claim, but the dosage being studied is 60 times higher than the typical amount of vitamin C that most people have in their diet.
* **Takeaways**: Promoting unsupported “cures” for the disease can be dangerous.

**Slide 12: The top COVID-19 myths: Who spreads it?**

* The vast majority of websites publishing coronavirus misinformation had published other toxic, untrue information prior to coronavirus, on topics like vaccines, cancer, and the Ebola epidemic. Many popular conspiracy theories emerged on websites with only small followings, and then were shared by more popular sites, and eventually appeared on several sites. The information is amplified and spread on social networks like Facebook and Twitter, and in messaging apps such as WhatsApp.

**Slide 13: The top COVID-19 myths: What are the motivations?**

* **Money:** Most news websites run advertisements, and every time someone reads or shares their articles, they make more money off those advertisements. Sometimes, health misinformation websites also sell products or services — which they often promote in their articles. For example, sites that claim “colloidal silver” cures coronavirus also sometimes sell it!
* **Power:** Some people spread misinformation to hurt their opponents (be it an individual, a political party, a foreign country, etc.) and to strengthen their own group/position. For example, the myth that claimed the coronavirus was stolen by Chinese spies in a lab could be an attempt to cast blame for the virus on China.
* **Entertainment:** Some people like to spread misinformation just because they think it’s funny — we call these “trolls.” Trolls may think that the misinformation they spread is just a joke, but the reality is, it can cause real damage.
* **Sloppiness:** Sometimes, people spread untrue information simply because they are sloppy. They don’t double check the facts or look at the source. This can be true in journalism, when reporters are under time pressure to publish a story quickly, and they don’t verify all of the information in the article.
* **Takeaway:** Health misinformation — and misinformation generally, as these motivators are typically also at play for all types of misinformation — is manipulative. Those who spread misinformation are trying to take advantage of you.

**Slide 14: Other COVID-19 online threats: Scammers and malware**

* Misinformation isn’t the only online threat associated with the coronavirus. There are also online scams that use the coronavirus to trick people into giving them money or personal information.
* TrendMicro, a security company, found that dozens of websites were set up that use coronavirus in their name and then try to take advantage of users, such as by taking their credit card information, in the example on the right.

**Slide 15: Part 2: Evaluating Sources**

* Explain that in this section we’ll talk about how you can evaluate whether a news and information site is a reliable source through the lens of NewsGuard’s nine criteria. We’ll go into detail about each criteria, which fall into two categories — credibility and transparency.

**Slide 16: Which source would you trust? (Discuss)**

* **Discuss:** Go through both screenshots one-by-one and have students say whether they think it’s a trustworthy source or not. Ask volunteers to explain their reasoning (credible or not) for each source.

**Slide 17: One method for evaluating sources: NewsGuard’s criteria**

* Introduce NewsGuard’s Nine Criteria, which assess basic practices of credibility and transparency based on widely-accepted journalistic standards.
* NewsGuard is a company run by journalists that fights misinformation by providing ratings of the reliability of sources. Its analysts rate sources by assessing their credibility and transparency.
	+ **Discuss**: Why are credibility and transparency important?
		- A **credible** source is one that has standards and processes to ensure that its information is generally fair and accurate. Sources that employ these standards have a history of publishing accurate information and will likely publish accurate information in the future.
		- A **transparent** source is one that is upfront with its readers about who is behind it, where its money is coming from, and who is producing its content. This transparency enables readers to understand what group, company, or individual(s) are responsible for the source, and thus allow readers to assess any biases or motivations it might have. It also holds the source accountable for what it publishes – most people don’t want their name associated with false or unreliable content.
* How a site is evaluated through these nine criteria determines whether it is assigned a red or green rating by NewsGuard, which indicates its credibility.
	+ Each criterion is worth a certain number of points out of 100. A site with a score of 60 points or higher receives a green rating. A site with a score lower than 60 points receives a red rating.
* **Discussion questions:** Which criteria do you think are most important in assessing a site’s credibility? Are there any other criteria that you would add to this list?

**Slide 18: What does NewsGuard say? (Answers)**

* Reveal which source is credible and which one is not, and compare that with what the students guessed.
	+ Cancer.net: **Reliable**
		- NewsGuard’s description: A cancer information website owned by a nonprofit that represents oncologists and other medical professionals.
	+ Cancer.news (Natural News website network): **Unreliable**
		- NewsGuard’s description: A network of sites promoting both medical and non-medical conspiracy theories, particularly the false claim that vaccines are linked to autism.
* **Takeaways**
	+ Students may have made credibility assessments based on the design of the site, but they should realize they should never rely solely on design when evaluating the credibility of a source. Some reliable websites may have a simple, unappealing design while unreliable websites may have a professional look.

**Slide 19: NewsGuard’s Nine Criteria: Credibility**

* Explain that the next six slides will explore NewsGuard’s credibility criteria in greater depth, including examples of how NewsGuard might determine whether a site adheres to each one.

**Slide 20: Does the site repeatedly publish false content?**

* There are two forms of false content:
	+ **Disinformation** is *intentionally* false or inaccurate information that is spread deliberately.
	+ **Misinformation** is incorrect information that is *unintentionally* false.
* Credible news and information websites may publish *misinformation*, but will promptly correct those errors when they are identified. Credible news and information websites would not publish *disinformation*.
* False information can appear in straight news stories, but also in opinion content.
* False stories on health sites can include potentially dangerous health claims (such as that baking soda or apricot pits treat cancer) or conspiracy theories related to health or medicine (such as that vaccines cause autism or that abortions cause breast cancer).
* **Discussion questions:** How can you tell the difference between what is false information and what is opinion? Is there a gray area for what can be considered factual?

**Slide 21: Does the site gather and present information responsibly?**

* **Gathering information**
	+ Different types of websites gather information in different ways.
		- **News organizations** like the New York Times or your local newspaper employ journalists, who talk directly to sources — public officials, people in the community, business leaders, and many more.
			* **Named sources** are people who are quoted in an article by name. “Mayor \_\_\_\_\_ told me…”
			* **Anonymous sources** are people who give information to a reporter but who ask not to be named. Sometimes this is for legitimate reasons (ask students what these might be) — for instance, if they are a government official and are telling a reporter important information that might otherwise be secret. But sometimes people ask to remain anonymous so that they are not held accountable for their words. **Be cautious** if an anonymous source is criticizing someone or something but does so in secret.
		- **News websites** often summarize articles from other places. Credible websites name their source: “As the Chicago Tribune reported…” or “According to ABCNews.com…”
		- **Wire services** are organizations like Reuters and the Associated Press (AP) that allow other outlets to post their stories with permission.
	+ It is important to consider how a website gathers information, and if they present evidence for their claims.
* **Presenting information**
	+ What are some indicators that a source is unreliable?
		- **Misstating facts**: Using only a certain part of a fact to lead readers to the wrong conclusion.
		- **Misquoting sources:** Using the correct quote from a source, but taking it out of context.
			* Example: “After 9pm, the only food I eat is ice cream.”
				+ Out of context: “The only food I eat is ice cream.”
		- **Violating journalistic ethics:** Reporters want people to tell them the truth, which means that reporters also have to be truthful about what they publish. Violating these rules could mean quoting someone without permission, or publishing information that they said was secret.
		- **Distort information:** Cherry picking or omitting key details to only show readers what you want them to see, rather than the whole truth.
		- **Rely on anecdotal evidence**: Drawing sweeping conclusions based on something that only happened to a few people or in small numbers.
			* Example: Two people show up at City Hall to stage a protest. They invite thousands of people, but no else comes.
			* “A protest outside City Hall reveals that voters are dissatisfied with the mayor,” reads the headline.
			* Why is that conclusion unfair and inaccurate?
* **Discussion**: Why is it important that news sources present the full story?

**Slide 22: Anecdotal evidence and the effects of wheatgrass**

* On the previous slide, students learned that anecdotal evidence alone is not enough for drawing a broad conclusion. This article claims to know the “secret” for avoiding gray hair based only on one woman’s experience.
	+ **Discussion**: Why should articles include evidence from more than one person or source? What does this article do wrong in terms of analyzing the facts?

**Slide 23: Does the site regularly correct or clarify errors?**

* Reliable news sites make correct errors when something in their original article was incorrect — often something small, like the spelling of a name or the wrong title (for instance, calling someone Mrs. Johnson instead of Dr. Johnson).
* **Corrections** are when a site updates a story to fix a mistake.They are often labeled as “correction,” “clarification,” “update,” or “editor’s note.” They typically appear at the top or the bottom of an article. Some news sites have separate pages listing all the corrections they have made.
* **Retractions** are when a site removes a story from its site and *retracts*, or reverses, its claims. Some websites will publish a separate post explaining this decision, while others do not notify readers. A retraction is often the result of new information the reporter discovered that makes the original story inaccurate.
	+ **Discussion**: Why is correcting errors a sign that a publication is *reliable,* when they are admitting that they got something wrong?
		- It shows that the site is transparent and willing to fix its mistakes. Many unreliable sites never correct mistakes, even though they routinely publish false or irresponsible information.

**Slide 24: Does the site handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly?**

* Defining the difference between news and opinion: news refers to factual information, while opinion involves a clear point of view/political perspective.
* Some websites only publish opinion stories, and others only publish news. Most sites fall somewhere in the middle.
* Is opinion content labeled and in a separate section? When credible news sites publish opinion stories or editorials, they usually reside in a separate section, or are labeled as such.
* What is the site’s point of view? Does the site disclose this point of view? All sites approach their reporting from some point of view, but some websites are more explicitly opinionated than others. Some sites explain their point of view on an About Us page or similar section. Others obscure their perspective or assume it is known by their readers.
* Does the site editorialize or cherry pick? When a site reflects a certain point of view, it might editorialize or cherry pick.
	+ **Editorializing**: when authors insert their opinion into news reports.
	+ **Cherry picking**: when a site only covers stories that support its point of view, or when a story only includes information that favors the author’s perspective.

**Slide 25: Does the site avoid deceptive headlines?**

* A headline tells a reader what’s in the story before he or she decides to read it. Some websites use exaggerated headlines that distort the facts in a story to entice people into clicking and reading an article.
* Deceptive headlines are dangerous because people may only skim headlines they encounter online and not take the time to read the articles.
* **Example headline**: “Secret to Defeating Coronavirus By April Revealed”
	+ **Discussion**: What might be wrong with this headline?
		- No experts have stated that there is a way to “defeat” coronavirus by April, as there is not yet a cure or vaccine for the coronavirus, making it false.
		- This headline tempts users into clicking and watching the video because it promises a “secret” without explaining what that “secret” is.

**Slide 26: NewsGuard’s Nine Criteria:** Transparency

* Explain that the next four slides will explore NewsGuard’s transparency criteria in greater depth, including examples of how NewsGuard might determine whether a site adheres to each one.

**Slide 27: Does the site disclose its ownership and financing?**

* There are a few main types of news/information website owners:
	+ **Individuals** who run their own news website or opinion blog.
	+ **Companies**, which can range from large media conglomerates like NBCUniversal and Sinclair, to small, family-owned businesses.
	+ **Nonprofit groups** such as the American Cancer Society or hospitals such as Cleveland.
		- **Note**: Not all “.org” sites are credible - e.g. OrangicConsumers.org
	+ **Governments** that own and fund health information sites, such as the CDC and the NHS
* Some sites hide the identity of their owner. According to NewsGuard’s analysis, of sites that completely hide their ownership, there’s a 94% chance they don’t meet other basic standards of credibility and transparency.
* Sites may be financed by advertisements, subscriptions, merchandise sales, sponsored content, parent company revenue, or donations.

**Slide 28: Does the site clearly label advertising?**

* **Advertisements**: Pictures and messages that promote a product or service. Some advertisements are designed to resemble other news stories and trick a user into clicking.
* **Sponsored content**: Stories that resemble news articles but are paid for by a company to promote its products or services. This should be labeled (e.g. “paid for by Dove”)
* **Affiliate marketing:** When a website promotes a product or service and makes money if users buy that product. This practice is OK so long as it’s clearly disclosed to readers
	+ **Example:** Healthy-Holistic-Living.com does **not** clearly disclose that the product promoted on the site is actually sold by a company run by the site’s owner

**Slide 29: Does the site reveal who’s in charge?**

* Owners, editors and publishers should be named, providing biographical and contact information, so that they can be held accountable for their site.
	+ A site’s “owner” is responsible for the site as a business or organization
	+ Its editors and publishers are responsible for the editorial decisions — what stories to cover, how, etc.
* Readers should be able to understand why someone might have created a site, and what might be their motivation.
* Those in charge should be easy to contact so they can receive feedback.
* **Example**: WebMD provides a page with the names, titles, photos, and biographies for those in charge of the site.

**Slide 30: Does the site provide information about its content creators?**

* Stories should be credited to an author, using their real name, or the site should identify its editorial staff.
	+ **Example**: The article pictured on the slide is not credited to a real person
	+ Sometimes, people write under a pseudonym, or a fake name, because they don’t want to be associated with what they write (maybe because they could get in trouble or lose their job).
* Websites should provide contact information for their authors and editors so readers can ask questions and make complaints.
* Content creators should list bios revealing their backgrounds and any conflicts of interest with what they report.

**Slide 31: Part 3: Evaluating Claims**

* Explain that in this section we’ll discuss how students can put their *source* evaluation skills to the test by doing some evaluation of specific *claims.*

**Slide 32: Evaluating Claims Introduction**

* Imagine you are on Facebook and you see your friend posted this article claiming that getting an IV with Vitamin C will cure coronavirus. Your job is to determine whether this is true.

**Slide 33: Evaluating Claims: Step One**

* First ask: What is the source?
* In this case, it’s NaturalHealth365.com. Do we know this source? Remember, we learned earlier that you can’t judge a source solely based on the URL name, so we will need to do some research.

**Slide 34: Evaluating Claims: Step One**

* We learned in the last section *how* to evaluate sources, using NewsGuard’s method. Say we went about that process. What would we learn?
* If you came to the same conclusion as NewsGuard, you would determine this site is not reliable. It publishes false claims about vaccines and the coronavirus and is not upfront about who owns or runs the website.

**Slide 35: Evaluating Claims: Step Two**

* Next, let’s ask: What do other sources say?
* Open a new tab or window and search the claim you are wondering about elsewhere.
* In this case, I search “Vitamin C cure coronavirus” and see that sources I know are credible — Forbes and Insider — tell me that high doses of vitamin C are *not* known cures for coronavirus.

**Slide 36: Evaluating Claims: Step Three**

* Always ask: What’s the date of the article or post I’m reading?
* It is always important to check the date of news articles to ensure you have the most current information, and it is *especially* important to do this when reading information about COVID-19 because it’s a new virus and our understanding of the virus and news about it changes so quickly.
* In this example, the article is already quite dated, so we should seek a more recent article covering the same topic, if possible.

**Slide 37: Evaluating Claims: Step Three**

* Think about the *motivation* behind this article or claim.
	+ Is the author or site affiliated with a political party or other ideological group that is trying to make you sympathetic to their cause?
	+ Is the article promoting a product or service that will help the author/website make money?
		- In this case, yes! The same article we are looking at has an advertisement for Vitamin C powder, and if you click on the link, it’s for a product sold on the website’s own store.

**Slide 38: Part 4: Exercise**

* Have students perform this exercise as an “in-class” activity or as an assignment on their own.

**Slide 39: Exercise description**

* Assign each student one of these four sites to evaluate using NewsGuard’s criteria.
	+ Have students start with just applying the four **transparency** criteria (6 - 9).
	+ If students have more time or want an extra challenge, they can then move on to the **credibility** criteria (1 - 5).
	+ For each criterion, have students say whether the site PASSES or FAILS the criterion, and provide a 1-2 sentence explanation of why.
	+ Once students have completed the exercise, circle up as a group and have students share their answers and explanations.
	+ Then, reveal what NewsGuard had determined (next two slides).

**Slide 40: Exercise answers part 1**

* **Health.com:**
	+ This site is generally reliable and passed all of NewsGuard’s criteria except two:
		- **Credibility:** NewsGuard did not find a consistent practice of publishing corrections.
		- **Transparency:** NewsGuard determined the site does not meet its standard for providing information about content creators because, although articles generally name their author, they do not always provide author contact or biographical information.
	+ **Discuss:** How did NewsGuard’s assessment differ from those of students?
* **MedicalNewsToday.com**
	+ The site is generally reliable and passed all but one of NewsGuard’s criteria:
		- **Credibility:** NewsGuard did not find a consistent practice of publishing corrections.
	+ **Discuss:** How did NewsGuard’s assessment differ from those of students?

**Slide 41: Exercise answers part 2**

* **HomeNaturalCures.com**
	+ This site is generally unreliable and fails various criteria:
		- **Credibility:** NewsGuard found that the site has published false claims, including unsubstantiated “cures” for the coronavirus, but it did not correct those stories.
		- **Transparency**: This site does not provide any information about who is behind it — its owners, editors, or authors.
	+ **Discuss:** How did NewsGuard’s assessment differ from those of students?
* **DoctorDavidFriedman.com**
	+ This site is generally unreliable and fails various criteria:
		- **Credibility:** Although NewsGuard did not determine that the site has repeatedly published false claims, the website failed NewsGuard’s standard for gathering and presenting information responsibly because it promoted misleading and unsubstantiated claims. NewsGuard also found that the site does not have consistent corrections practices and does not clearly label its opinion stories, because NewsGuard does not consider “blog” a clear indication of opinion.
		- **Transparency**: The site provides Friedman’s biography on its about page, indicating that he is “in charge.” All articles are credited to him, and he can be reached by a general contact form on the site, leading NewsGuard to determine the site passes its standard for providing contact information for the site’s content creators (because he’s the only one creating content on the site). The site does not, however, make it clear that Friedman owns the site. Separately, various articles promote products that either are sold directly by Friedman or by which Friedman is sponsored, but this financing relationship is not disclosed on the site.
* **Discuss:** How did NewsGuard’s assessment differ from those of students?