



Using NewsGuard in a Media Literacy Lesson

A Guide with Exercises for Educators and School Librarians

Guide Outline

- Pages 2-7: Background on NewsGuard and Media Literacy Discussion
- Pages 8: Suggested Exercises
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What is NewsGuard?

NewsGuard is a tool for assessing online sources and teaching news literacy. NewsGuard’s team of experienced journalists rates and reviews thousands of news and information websites to help readers know which websites they can generally trust—and which they should not.

How does NewsGuard review websites?

Each website is rated using nine standards of credibility and transparency. A full “Nutrition Label” review explains each rating and discusses the site’s ownership, financing, content, credibility, transparency, and history.

Why is NewsGuard relevant?

As misinformation spreads online and distrust in the media rises, it’s increasingly important for students to understand the credibility of sources they encounter on social media and in search engine results. NewsGuard helps by equipping people with more context for what they read online.

Who should use this guide?

Educators and librarians in middle school, high school, and higher education teaching media literacy to students in a course on civics, writing, journalism, or other subjects that require research on news and current affairs. This guide helps students use NewsGuard as a resource as they develop the skills to assess the reliability of online information.

When should I introduce NewsGuard to my students?

Educators are encouraged to introduce NewsGuard ahead of a research unit or at the beginning of the semester or year if the course will involve a lot of online research and current events discussions. Educators may also consider incorporating a NewsGuard demo into existing technology overview sessions during which instructors give students an overview of the software, databases, and other tools they have at their disposal.

How do you access NewsGuard’s reviews?

NewsGuard offers a desktop browser extension for [Chrome](#), [Edge](#), [Firefox](#), or [Safari](#). After installing the extension, NewsGuard’s red and green icons appear next to headlines in social media feeds and search results. Hovering over each icon reveals a short description of the website and a link to access the full “Nutrition Label” review of the site.

What does success for students look like when using NewsGuard?

Students who get the most out of NewsGuard will...

- Rely on high-quality sources in all class assignments
- Understand NewsGuard’s nine criteria and be able to articulate why they are important
- Be able to identify credible sources — even without the help of NewsGuard
- Understand the nuance between sources of different quality. They know that not all green sites are equal, and some are more credible than others.
- Apply what they have learned outside of the classroom, questioning dubious sources they see on social media and elsewhere

What are the outcomes of using this guide?

This guide is aligned with [the Common Core](#) anchor standards and the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE) standards for technology use, articulated in full on page 13.

Introduction to NewsGuard

- [NewsGuard](#) was launched in March 2018 by veteran journalists Steven Brill and Gordon Crovitz to tackle the problem of misinformation online.
- As tech companies relied on algorithms and artificial intelligence to try to address the problem, Brill and Crovitz saw the need for human intelligence to be part of the solution.
- NewsGuard employs experienced journalists who have reviewed all the news and information websites that account for more than 95% of online engagement in the U.S., in English, using [nine criteria](#) for credibility and transparency.
- Unlike fact-checking, which addresses controversial individual stories only after they have spread online, NewsGuard reviews websites as a whole based on their general reliability.

NewsGuard’s “Nutrition Label” Reviews

- NewsGuard analyzes each site using nine journalistic standards for credibility and transparency.
- Each review starts with the premise that a site should be **green** until an evaluation, based on those nine criteria, produces a **red** rating.
- Each of the nine criteria is assigned a certain number of points, adding up to 100. A website that scores less than 60 points is rated red.
- Some criteria are worth more than others. For example, a website that repeatedly publishes false content loses more points than a site that does not provide information about the people creating its content. A table explaining the weight of points is available on [NewsGuard’s website](#).

	OR	
 Does not repeatedly publish false content		
 Gathers and presents information responsibly		
 Regularly corrects or clarifies errors		
 Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly		
 Avoids deceptive headlines		
 Website discloses ownership and financing		
 Clearly labels advertising		
 Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest		
 Provides information about content creators		

- Each site’s detailed “Nutrition Label” explains its rating by describing the site’s adherence to the nine criteria and reviewing its ownership, financing, content, credibility, transparency, and history.
- Not all sites rated **green** are equal, nor are all sites rated **red**. There is a wide variety in quality within the categories of green and red. A site can fail a few criteria but still receive a green overall, and a site can pass a few criteria but still receive a red. Users should consult the full Nutrition Label and criteria checklist in addition to a site’s overall rating.
- Each rating and Nutrition Label undergoes a formal process of review, detailed on [NewsGuard’s website](#).
- Ratings and labels are regularly updated, and NewsGuard lists the names and email addresses of the writers and editors who review each site.

THE BROWSER EXTENSION

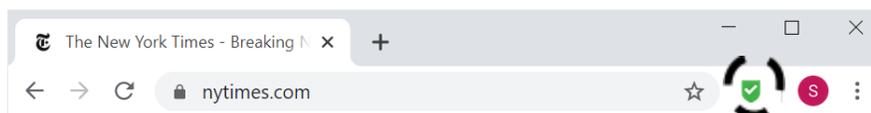
Installing the NewsGuard browser extension

If you haven’t yet, install the extension for Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or Safari by following the link for your browser. For more detailed installation instructions, consult the [NewsGuard School Installation Guide](#).

- Google Chrome: <http://bit.ly/2mMUEKj>
- Microsoft Edge: <http://bit.ly/2NOASX6>
- Mozilla Firefox: <http://mzl.la/2x4rE5w>
- Apple Safari: <https://apple.co/2pPR8jJ>

What you will see

Once you install NewsGuard’s browser extension, NewsGuard rating icons will begin to appear next to links on search engines and social media feeds, including Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Bing. Ratings also appear in the upper-right corner of websites rated by NewsGuard, next to the URL bar.



Interacting with the extension

1. NewsGuard ratings will appear next to website links on social media or search results.

2. Hover over each icon to see a brief description of the site and why it received its rating.
3. To see the full rating of each website, click, “See the full Nutrition Label.” Each Nutrition Label describes the website’s background, ownership, and why it received its rating—including its performance on each of the nine criteria:

THE NEWSGUARD ICONS



A site with a **red** badge lacks credibility or transparency in important areas and should generally not be trusted as the primary source of information. Users should always independently verify information on **red** sites, and if they feel there is a compelling case for citing a **red** site, they should be able to clearly articulate why.



A site with a **green** badge can generally be trusted, but not all sites rated **green** are equal. A **green** site may still lack credibility or transparency in certain key areas. Users should read the full Nutrition Label to understand any shortcomings of the site that might impact whether they should trust its information.



A website intended to entertain. Unlike a false news website that is intentionally deceiving, a satirical website is upfront about its nature, or widely known to be a parody. A common example is The Onion. Much like a **red** website, an **orange** website should typically not be consulted as the primary source of information, unless there is a compelling reason for citing it.



A platform, such as Wikipedia or YouTube, where users produce content that might not be edited or vetted for accuracy. Readers should independently verify information on the platform using reputable sources.



When a white badge appears next to the URL bar of a website, or no badge appears next to a link on social media or in search results, it indicates that NewsGuard has not rated the site and does not plan to rate it soon. This does not mean that it isn’t a reliable source; it likely means that the website is not a typical news website, or that it does not have a large enough reach for NewsGuard to consider rating it.

NEWSGUARD'S NINE CRITERIA

CREDIBILITY

- False Content** **Does the site repeatedly publish false content?** While many websites occasionally make mistakes, sites that do not promptly correct those errors may be trying to misinform readers. False stories can range from political conspiracy theories to health myths.
- Gathering & Presenting** **Does the site gather and present information responsibly?** *Gathering* information responsibly involves referencing multiple sources, preferably those that present firsthand information on a subject. *Presenting* information responsibly means providing a balanced, fair account of events – not misstating facts, misquoting sources, or distorting information by only including certain facts while leaving out other key details.
- Corrections** **Does the site regularly correct errors?** Even the most reliable news organizations sometimes make mistakes, but credible news outlets should have a policy for routinely correcting their errors and transparently communicating those corrections to readers – such as by adding a “correction” notice or “editor’s note” to stories.
- News vs. Opinion** **Does the site handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly?** Some websites only publish opinion stories, and others only publish news reports, but many sites publish a mixture of both. Credible news outlets should make it clear to their readers which stories contain commentary – such as by labeling them “opinion” or publishing them in an opinion section. If a website approaches its reporting from a certain point of view, it should clearly disclose its perspective to readers.
- Deceptive Headlines** **Does the site avoid publishing deceptive headlines?** A headline tells a reader what is 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.

TRANSPARENCY

- Ownership & Financing** **Does the site disclose its ownership and financing?** News organizations may be owned by an individual, a private company, a nonprofit organization, or a government. Transparent sites should clearly tell readers who owns the site and where its money is coming from – especially if the owners or funders have political or ideological motivations.

Advertising **Does the site clearly label advertising?** Sometimes companies will pay to have articles written about them or pay to run ads that look like stories. Transparent sites should make it clear to the reader what content is paid for, and what is independent editorial content.

Who's in Charge **Does the site reveal who's in charge?** Sites should clearly identify those in charge of making decisions about reporting and coverage – such as their editor(s) or publisher(s) – so that they can be held accountable for content on their site.

Content Creators **Does the site identify its content creators?** Stories should be attributed to an author, using their real name. The site should also provide contact information for its content creators, so readers can ask questions and make complaints, and bios revealing their backgrounds and any conflicts of interest with what they report.

Reading a Nutrition Label

- **Ownership and Financing:** Names a site's owner and describes how it is financed.
- **Content:** Describes the type of stories, videos, and other information that a reader will encounter on a site. Also explains if the site reflects an ideology.
- **Credibility:** Illustrates whether a site's reporting is credible, and explains why it may have received a **red X** for any credibility criteria.
- **Transparency:** Describes how much information a site provides about itself, and explains why it may have received a **red X** for any transparency criteria.
- **History:** Provides context for how long a website has been around, why it was started, and what changes it may have undergone over the years.
- **Sources:** Contains a full list of sources, organized by section, to support each fact stated in the Nutrition Label. Users can consult the source list to verify statements made in the label.
- **Authors:** Each label names the analysts and editors that reviewed that website, providing their bio and email address for anyone with questions or concerns.

eonline.com

The online extension of E!, a 24-hour cable TV entertainment news channel, produced by E! Entertainment Television, which offers entertainment news.

Ownership and Financing	The site is owned by NBCUniversal Inc., a subsidiary of the world's largest telecommunication company.
Content	Eonline.com publishes stories, photos, and videos about entertainment news, as well as content from television shows like "Keeping up with the Kardashians" for coverage of celebrity events and award shows. It also features photo galleries and fashion reviews posted by users. It has sections on red carpet events, original film news, and celebrity lifestyles, including fitness. A livestream of the cable TV channel is available for subscribers.
Credibility	Text and video stories are produced by staff writers and celebrity news by quoting unnamed sources. It has also relied on second-hand information from other websites like TMZ that often report without much elaboration. Headlines speak in tabloid gossip style: "Up for a Selfie at Colosseum in Rome," "Celebrate at Baby Shower with Kim Kardashian."
Transparency	The site does not provide information about its authors. Biographies can be found on the NBCUniversal website. Comments at the end of each news story include a feedback link, but does not make clear how to contact the site's editors. Editors at Eonline.com and representatives of NBCUniversal are listed in the footer.

Exercises

After introducing students to the NewsGuard framework for evaluating online information, present them with these exercises to put their media literacy skills to the test.

Be Your Own NewsGuard: Evaluating Websites

Objective: Think critically about the content of websites and develop your own criteria for evaluating their credibility.

Suggested time: 60 minutes

- (20 minutes) **Without using the NewsGuard browser extension:** Have students evaluate selected NewsGuard-rated websites. Students should answer the following question: Is this site credible and transparent?
 - In a small group, students read and research websites and, together, write up their rationale.
- (20 minutes) **The groups share their conclusions and criteria used to evaluate sites with one another.**
- (20 minutes) **As a class, refer to the NewsGuard ratings and reviews of each website to compare and contrast students' criteria with NewsGuard's criteria.**
 - How did students' assessments compare to those of NewsGuard?
 - Were there any disagreements?
 - Anything students missed?
 - Anything NewsGuard missed?

Be Your Own NewsGuard: Writing a Nutrition Label

Objective: Apply NewsGuard's criteria to a website and discuss their benefits and limitations.

Suggested time: 60 minutes

- (40 minutes) **After teaching students NewsGuard’s nine criteria, have them apply the criteria by writing a Nutrition Label for a news source not rated by NewsGuard**, such as their school newspaper.
 - (20 minute) **Discuss as a class:** what made the source credible or transparent? What made evaluation difficult?
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Be Your Own NewsGuard: Not all Greens Are Equal

Objective: Understand the nuances in quality of different news sources and be able to recognize that even sites that strive to provide accurate information may still have flaws.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

- **Compare two green-rated websites from NewsGuard that receive different ratings on certain criteria**
 - For example, look at two popular lifestyle websites: People.com and BroBible.com. People fails two criteria, while BroBible fails none.
 - **Discuss:** When might some of those failings be a problem? What, then, does a green badge tell us? Should we let our guard down when we visit green-rated sites?
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False Content: Can You Spot the Fake?

Objective: Develop the ability to distinguish between trustworthy news and false content.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

- (5 minutes) **Without using the NewsGuard browser extension:** Have students quickly evaluate two websites: heraldonline.com, a local newspaper in South Carolina, and tennesseestar.com, a fake news website designed to appear to be a local news site.
 - (10 minutes) **Discuss as a group:** Would you share stories from either of these sites? Should you trust these websites? Why or why not?
 - (5 minutes) **Read NewsGuard’s reviews.** Was there anything you missed?
 - (10 minutes) **Discuss:** Have you ever fallen for a false story? Do you know anyone who has?
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Correcting Errors: Setting the Record Straight

Objective: Learn how and why news outlets make mistakes and discuss different approaches for addressing these mistakes.

Suggested time: 40 minutes

- (25 minutes) **Look at a few corrections news sites have issued** by browsing recent articles from news websites. Some errors are more benign (for example, when articles misspell a person’s name), and other corrections are more consequential (when an article falsely accuses someone of something they didn’t do, or if a reporter fabricated evidence).
 - **Discuss:** Why were these corrections important? What do they tell us about the institution?
 - (15 minutes) Look at the Nutrition Label for The Daily Mail (DailyMail.co.uk).
 - **Discuss:** Why does this website fail the “regularly corrects errors” criterion when they have issued corrections in the past?
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Opinion and perspective

Objective: Evaluate how an author’s perspective can shape the way information is presented.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

- (30 minutes) **Look at how the same story is reported from sources with different views.**
 - Pick a site on the left (e.g. HuffPost, Altnet, or Mother Jones), a site in the middle (e.g. Reuters or the Associated Press), and a site on the right (e.g. The Daily Caller, The Daily Wire, or the Washington Times). [Allsides](#) may be a useful resource for choosing sites.
 - **Discuss:** What changes from one story to another? Is information distorted? Are some facts cherry picked, and others left out?
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Headlines: Straightforward or Sensational?

Objective: Think critically about the way a headline can communicate the main points of a story and attract readers' interest.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

- (15 minutes) **Present a complicated or sensationalized headline from the day's news.**
 - Encourage students to rewrite the headline as a 140-character Tweet, or in fewer (e.g. only five) words.
 - (15 minutes) **Students share their examples and discuss in small groups:** What gets distorted about a story when you omit or change certain words in a headline? Why would a site write a sensational headline?
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Ownership and Financing: Who's Behind Your News?

Objective: Identify the different types of actors behind news websites and evaluate the merits and possible shortcomings of news presented by each type of actor.

Suggested time: 45 minutes

- (15 minutes) **Without using NewsGuard:** Have students determine the owners of different websites and decide whether their identity might affect the quality of the site's reporting
 - RT.com, CBC.ca, and foxhole.news
 - (15 minutes) **Students discuss their ratings in small groups.**
 - (15 minutes) **Refer to the NewsGuard ratings and reviews of each website.**
 - How did students' assessments compare to those of NewsGuard?
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Platforms

Objective: Recognize the difference between unvetted content supplied by users and vetted content that has been reviewed for accuracy.

Suggested time: 20 minutes

- **Look at the Nutrition Labels for platforms, such as Wikipedia and YouTube.**
 - **Discuss:** Why are these sites considered platforms, and what makes that different from a green or a red site? When can it be useful to access information on these websites? When can relying on them be problematic?

Outcomes

This guide aligns with [the Common Core](#) anchor standards for language arts and social studies and the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE) standards for technology engagement:

Reading

- “Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4
- “Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6
- “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8
- “Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

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 plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.” — ISTE 3a
- “Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.” — ISTE 3b
- “Students curate information from digital resources using a variety of tools and methods to create collections of artifacts that demonstrate meaningful connections or conclusions.” — ISTE 3c
- “Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.” — ISTE 3d

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

Language

- “Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.” — Common Core CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3

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