MediaWise

Student Manual
2019

[What is MediaWise](#)

Have you ever shared something online that ended up being fake? You are not alone! Even [YouTubers](#) have this problem. It's hard for *everyone* to discern fact from fiction online.

Professional fact checkers and platforms alone cannot solve the problem of rampant online misinformation. There are too many hoaxers and too many opportunists. To fully combat the spread of misinformation online, we must teach a new generation to be more skilled evaluators of digital content. That's our goal with the groundbreaking non-profit project called **MediaWise**.

MediaWise is part of the Google News Initiative, funded by Google.org, which aims to teach 1 million teenagers how to spot fake news on the internet by 2020, with at least half of them coming from underserved or low-income communities.

We're working with [YouTube Creators](#) like [John Green](#), best-selling author of *The Fault in Our Stars,* host and co-creator of the [CrashCourse](#) YouTube channel (which has 8.5M subscribers), and other social media influencers to get our teachings and message out.

MediaWise is a partnership between [The Poynter Institute](#), the [Stanford History Education Group (SHEG)](#), the [Local Media Association (LMA)](#)and the [National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)](#). It is part of the Google News Initiative and funded by Google.org.

What is the teen fact-checking network

One of the key components of MediaWise is the teen fact-checking network. Our goal is to have individual students contribute at least two fact-checks per month in the form of MediaWise's Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, and we're looking for a commitment of at least ten weeks. We'll be doing this all year long and our goal is to have published a minimum of 100 fact checks by June, 2019 and then another 125 by December, 2019. But the more the merrier!

Getting started

Your to-do list:

1. Turn in your signed [media release form](). This **must** be turned in by **Jan. 22.**
2. Sign up for [Slack](). You can download Slack (free) from the app store. You can also get an app for your computer's desktop.
3. Watch all of John Green's [Crash Course Navigating Digital Information]() series. (These videos are really awesome!)
4. Watch our video, [How YOU Can Fact-Check the Internet](). This video has 5 great tips for fact-checking the Internet.
5. Read the [MediaWise Content Standards & Guidelines]() - this is super key information you need to know.
6. **Time for TikTok!** Your first assignment is to come up with a fun TikTok idea for MediaWise. We're new to TikTok, so we're hoping you guys have some ideas! Think about what is trending on the app. How can we turn that into content relating to fact-checking? Your deadline is **Jan. 21.** Drop your TikTok idea in the #TikTok channel on Slack.

In the first week, we will hold a mandatory Google Hangout session to introduce and onboard everyone.

TFCN Communication Breakdown:

- Direct contact - [Contact list for TFCN students]() & MediaWise staff which includes emails and phone numbers
- Info relating to our stories will be communicated through Slack. See the channels (hashtags) below to learn what goes where:
    - **#General**- announcements about the project
        - Weekly updates for students from the MediaWise team
    - **#Pitches**- place to post story ideas from TFCN students
        - Once the pitch is approved a member of the MW staff will [add it to the buffet]() with the assigned deadline.
        - MW staff will also share quick-turn story ideas in here for TFCNers to pick-up, for whoever is available
    - **#questionsandanswers**- drop questions that come up while filming/during the researching process here
    - **#random**- send us any of your fav memes of the week, funny articles etc.
    - **#tiktok** - If you have a solid idea for a MediaWise TikTok, this is the place to share it!
    - **#tutorials** - Here is where to learn new skills for Instagram story editing

Once logged in on your phone or computer you will then tap/click "CHANNELS" to view all channels available in that workspace. Go ahead and join all of them.

Deadlines and Communications

Like in any newsroom, deadlines are important. MediaWise aims to post fact-checks daily. This means we need to plan our social media content **in advance**. MediaWise and Poynter have a broad reach, but we want to expand and grow our following. MediaWise has more than:

- **9,000** Twitter followers
- **6,800** Instagram followers
- **3,800** Facebook Likes
- **1.4 million** page views on Poynter.org

In order to gain a larger following, we need to be posting consistently, which makes deadlines so important. That being said, we understand that you have a lot going on with school, jobs, clubs and sports. We want to give you achievable deadlines, so it's best to **be honest if you think a deadline won't work for your schedule.**

Working in teams

Over the next 10 weeks you will work with a partner to debunk information online. If you applied with a friend, we will do our best to make sure you are in a team together. Our goal is to have a returning fact-checker team up with a new fact-checker. Each team will have their own channel in Slack. There, you can work together on scripts, coordinate who will film the fact-check and communicate with the MediaWise staff.

While working with a partner is great, **you can also contribute as many solo fact-checks as you would like.** Each script template should be filled out completely with who worked on the fact-check. Treat this like your byline. If we do not know who worked on the fact-check, **we can not pay you for it.**

Choosing a fact-check

To start a MediaWise fact-check, you need to start by choosing an appropriate claim to check. **Choosing one is crucial.** If you choose a statement or claim that is too long or too complicated, it can make your reporting and production of your social post more difficult, and you may reach a point where you have to scrap it and try another claim. Finding a good claim takes practice so it will get easier with time and be sure to ask lots of questions!

In general, our goal is to fact-check something that makes a reasonable person think, "Hmm, is that true?" We also want to **pick claims that are engaging to our**

audience of middle and high school students. So if you find a story fun, interesting and engaging, chances are your peers will too!

While some fact-checking organizations focus on one subject, we want MediaWise to explore any content that a teenager might see. The latest viral meme and trending topics, stories on pop culture and entertainment, sports, the environment, politics, fitness and health, etc. — they're all fair game.

We also want to fact-check information that is already widespread. We want to focus on big stories that have garnered the attention of a lot of people on social media. We are looking for **big impact.** It's also important that each fact-check explains why it matters that this information you are fact-checking is significant. If you have trouble answering 'why does this fact-check matter?' Then move onto the next one.

What makes a good Instagram fact-check?

First and foremost, we cannot fact-check opinions. For example, we can not fact-check when Kanye West says he has the "best rap album of 2018." But if he said he had the best-performing rap album of 2018 - that's fact-checkable.

We also can't fact-check predictions or promises.

The best fact-checks are short and easily explained. Just go to MediaWise's Instagram to see some good examples:

- Did TikTok ban LGBTQ content? Needs Context.
- Is Simba really going vegan? No.
- Do your taste buds change every 7 years? Nope.
- Did the Arctic ice caps really melt this much in 10 years? No.
- Did a teen's lung collapse after vaping? Needs context.

In each example, the fact-check answers a question that a reader might have. Instagram fact-checks should have a visual element that helps tell the story, and should be easily explained within 8-15 Instagram clips.

What makes a good text-only fact-check?
This round of the teen fact-checking network we are expanding with text-only fact-checks. Think **Snopes** or **Politifact**. These fact-check articles will live on a MediaWise blog page on Poynter's website. Here's what makes a good text-only fact-check:

- More complicated stories that can't be easily explained in 8-15 short clips

- Stories that are interesting, but lack a visual element (original photos, videos, tweets or charts). Example: Trend articles or scientific studies that use generic iStock photos.

How do I find a check?

Most of the content we fact-check originates on social media. Scour through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat, Tumblr, etc. for claims to fact-check.

There is no science to finding a claim on social media. Start off by looking through your own feed and the people you follow.

If you can't find any claims on your own feed, get creative. The Instagram explore page is an excellent place to find misleading content. Also, experiment with hashtags. Search hashtags relevant to the news of the day and what's trending. For example, during the California wildfires, there were some miscaptioned photos that could be found searching #caliwildfires. Bonus point for pitching fact-checks for stories that are trending because we can tap into those conversations happening on social media and reach more people with our content and MediaWise teachings and message.

If you can't find anything on your own social media, see what other fact-checkers/reporters are up to. Good sources to check are Snopes, Buzzfeed and PolitiFact.

Their content can give you a good idea of what's circulating on the Internet.

How to pitch fact-checks

Before you send us a pitch, it's important that you do some **initial research.** This will make your life so much easier. Spend some time looking into the claim -- you might discover that it's more complicated than you originally thought and will help you decide which format might be best. Doing some initial digging will also help you decide if this story is best told through an IG video or in a text-only article.

Where do I put fact-check ideas?
Once you find a possible fact-check, add it to the **#pitches** channel on slack. This channel will house all potential checks. Once the pitch has been approved it will be added to the MediaWise buffet, and you will be given a deadline for when the story is due.

In the event that each team and/or teen is assigned a story at that time, a MW staff member will add the idea to a list of story ideas to potentially be assigned later.

We want daily pitches! No need to wait for your assigned week to pitch us a story . If you have the flexibility to pick up an additional fact-check we're happy to have the additional checks. Alternatively, you may send a fact-check idea and we may assign it to another student to do and create a video out of it. This is a team effort! It's OK to pitch a story if you are already working on another story - if it's a trending topic, we want to hear it! We may have you stop what you're currently working on to working on trending stories is not easy but it will help us grow our audience and make the content more relevant to our viewers as well

Types of fact-checks

MediaWise fact-checks typically fall into a few categories:

- **Questionable statements.** Social media users will cite a statistic or make a claim that is either wrong, or missing important context that could give someone a different impression.

- **False news.** The claims can be about anything -- politics, entertainment, a fishy-sounding medical cure. Regardless of the claim's content, false news is made-up content that intentionally poses as news coverage of actual events.

- **Doctored images/video.** Social media accounts will often share photos or videos of celebrities that have been manipulated.

- **Satire gone awry**. We don't fact-check websites like the Onion or Clickhole because they are satire websites. However, sometimes satire can be shared on social media without people knowing. Here's a good explainer on satire.

Ratings

For every fact-check story, we include a rating that tells our audience what we concluded once we finished fact-checking a particular claim. MediaWise fact-checks typically fall into these ratings.

- **Legit.** The claim, photo or video is real and the information is accurate. (Example: Are train workers lighting train tracks on fire in Chicago? Yes.) (Example: Kamala Harris did not sue ExxonMobil? Yes.)

- **Not legit.** The claim, photo or video is not completely accurate, or being taken out of context. [(Example: Do your taste buds change every seven years? No.)](#)
- **Fake.** The claim, photo or video is made up and has no basis in the truth. (Example: [Did Kevin Hart really become paralyzed and injure his vocal cords after a car crash? Bogus story](#))
- **Satire:** The claim, photo or video used humor, irony, exaggeration, and false information to comment on current events and pop culture. It may be fake but it's meant to be a joke.
- **Needs context.** The claim, photo or video does not have all of the information needed to be fully understood and assessed. (Example: [Did this teen's lung collapse after vaping for 18 months? Maybe](#).)
- **Doctored.** The photo, video or graphic has been altered and no longer reflects its original meaning.
- **Sus.** There is no evidence to support the photo, video or claim, but nothing that proves it wrong. (Example: [Is it illegal to kiss more than 5 minutes in Iowa?](#))

If you are not sure which category to label your claim - just ask us! We're happy to help you and frankly, the crazy world of misinformation online is rapidly changing so you may discover something that doesn't neatly fit into these categories and we may need to come up with a new one!

In order to determine a rating for your claim ask yourself the following questions:
- Is this there any element of truth to the claim?
- What parts, if any, are misleading, fake or false?
- Does the claim include an edited video or image?
- Do you have enough information to justifiably rate the claim **Legit** or **Not Legit?**

Depending on the story, you may state your rating early on in your script or copy, or you may state it towards the end. Bottom line: be sure to include a rating for the claim!

How to fact-check claims

Fact-checks can seem daunting, especially when you don't know where to start. Here are some techniques to get you started.

1) Research, research, and research some more with lateral reading and a keyword search

Get off the post or page your looking at, and Google relevant topics to answer who is behind the information. We call this **lateral reading** (see more about that here.)

Don't stop after one or two queries. Try multiple combinations when you are searching a topic. This is called a keyword search.

Helpful research and filming tools:

- Reverse Google Image Search. If you are unsure if the photo you're looking at has been manipulated, do a Reverse Google Image Search. Drag and drop the photo in to a Google image search bar. The query will bring up relevant fact-checks and unaltered photos if they exist.
  - How to perform a reverse Google Image search on your cell phone
  - How to perform a reverse Google Image search on desktop
  - Other tools
    - TinEeye
    - InVID
    - RevEye
- Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. Use this tool if you are looking for a post or story that was deleted or altered. The Wayback Machine archives old information that people have taken down from the web.
- Twitter advanced search. Use this tool when you are looking for old tweets or tweets mentioning a particular subject.
- Video teleprompter. This is a great tool for filming Instagram stories. It is free to use for videos with 750 characters or less!

2) Use reputable sources. After you've done basic research, your next step will depend on the type of claim. Depending on the fact-check, you will need to consult multiple sources.

Always verify statistics with reputable research and data. For example, if you are fact-checking claim about unemployment, use data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Examples of good sources
- U.S. Census Bureau: Demographics, geographic information, and education for U.S. population.
- Data.gov: An open data source for U.S. government data.
- Pew Research Center: U.S. policy; journalism and the media

3) Ask yourself these questions

Who is behind the information?
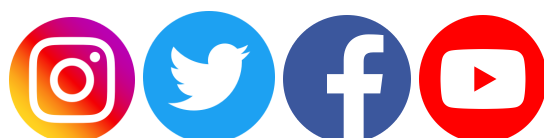
What is the evidence?

What do other sources say?

Do stories include bylines? Stories without bylines are less likely to be legitimate.

Do photos included with stories include photo credits?Do the photo credits appear legitimate? Photos without credits are less likely to be legitimate.

Do stories include clear sourcing? Do stories on the website make clear where they are getting their information from? Does the story include hyperlinks to mainstream sources? Stories without clear sourcing are less likely to be legitimate.

Does the story have a date on it? Legitimate news organizations conspicuously date their stories, sometimes down to the minute, to provide context and a timeline for when an event occurred. Fake news sites, meanwhile, often omit the date on their stories, to obscure when an article was posted.

How to write a script for your Instagram Story fact-check

One of the primary ways we present fact-check stories is through Instagram Story and also create highlights out of them for later reference.

For each fact-check, you'll write a script (which we will edit and help you with) outlining your story. Please try to save and upload your scripts to this folder so we can keep track. It may be a good idea to bookmark that link for quick access later.

Here is our script template with an example, and here are some tips on writing them:

- **Write succinctly.** Don't waste words. Get to the point as soon as possible, and do not use flowery language that you would otherwise never use.
- **Write conversationally.** Your scripts should sound like you are explaining the topic to your friends. We highly encourage you to read your scripts aloud as you are writing them. It feels weird at first but it's a very effective way to make your scripts sound conversational and closer to how you actually talk.

Naturally, every MediaWise fact-check is different, so they won't all follow the same recipe, and they won't all be the same length. We want you to be creative! Pitch us

ideas for how to represent your story visually. Fact-checking is important and hard work but can also be fun and we want you to enjoy it, so get creative with your social media skills!

How to write a text-only fact-check

For a text-only fact-check you will write an article that will be published on the new MediaWise blog on The Poynter Institute's website. Similar to the Instagram stories, text-only fact-checks will also explain to our readers *how* we got to our rating. Style guide notes from above apply for text-only stories as well -- keep it casual, keep it conversational. These text-only fact-checks will also be posted to facebook. Here is a good example! And another!

Here is the text-only template for Facebook text format fact-checks and an example.

- **Subheads.** Each text-only article will be divided into subheads to help break up the article. The story will determine which subheads need to be used, but every article will need an "Our Rating" subhead. **Other examples:** Start With A Keyword Search, Try Lateral Reading, Who's Behind the Info?, Find a Verified Source and Bonus Tips.
- **Hyperlinks.** Every source needs to be hyperlinked throughout the article.
- **Incorporate digital storytelling.** Our blog allows us to embed tweets, Facebook posts, quotes and Youtube videos. Think about how you can use these elements in your favor to break up text.
- Goal post for length: **400 words**

Sharing your work

It's time to promote your work! You will also be responsible to write social media posts to promote and share your fact-checks. We won't always use your social copy, but it's good practice.

The copy for the posts should be punchy and incorporate hashtags for anything that's trending (check what's trending!), emojis and any other relevant visuals.

Assigning and starting your fact-check

In a perfect world, it should take you one week MAX to complete a story from top-to-bottom. Students will be assigned fact-checks as we go and we will set

individual deadlines based on the below 7-day schedule. This schedule is subject to change based on the news cycle and TFCNers' schedules.

Rough Schedule
7 days in advance: student pitches idea - MediaWise team reviews and responds within 1 day (usually less!) and assigns deadlines.
*One deadline for script and one deadline for video.

6 days in advance: idea is agreed upon between student and MediaWise team and student begins production process by doing research and writing a script
*If you don't have a pitch we will assign you something! Don't worry!

4 days in advance: first draft of script is due. MediaWise team has 24 hours to respond and works with student on script.

3 days in advance: student starts filming once script is approved

2 days in advance: first draft of video story is due for review. MediaWise team workshops the story with the student over the course of 24 hours

1 day in advance: final video is signed off on by MediaWise team

Game day: story goes live in the morning on MediaWise accounts across social!

Depending on your availability, we may ask you (totally optional) to pick up 'day-of' or trending topics that are in the news cycle on any given day.

The MediaWise team works during business hours: 9:30 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you send us a Slack message over the weekend, we will respond Monday.

How to film your Instagram story

Your Instagram story will be a combination of selfie videos, screenshots, and text posts (and anything else creative you come up with that is native to IG). Here are some tips:

- If you are shooting in selfie mode, hold the camera up high and walk or turn in place add movement. Movement in videos is proven to increase engagement which will help the performance of our videos. In other words - people will be more inclined to watch your story and stick with it! However, don't walk just to walk, you can move around in place for example. Whatever feels and looks natural is what we're going for with movement on camera.
- Another great way to add movement is the zoom in/out feature. Think about how "The Office" uses the zoom-in feature for comedic effect. *(Side note: Alexa can smoke all of you at some Office Trivia.)*

- Use GIFs, emojis, and hashtags liberally - and make them relevant to the story! The best stories have these elements throughout and are selected with care and effort and it really makes a difference in the quality of the finished product.
- Take advantage of all of the features Instagram has to offer - superzooms, boomerangs, questions, emoji sliders
- For IG Story: 6-15 posts for arc of single narrative (Look at @instagram account)
- Post 60% video (mix with stills) for IG story - video is correlated with higher engagement. We don't want to see multiple selfie videos in a row, with no elements to break it up or at least added GIFs or the like to keep it interesting and keep the viewers engaged.
- Music is a great addition to screen recordings. However, instead of adding music to your clips, **please include the name of the song/artist to your script.** We will add the music for you to our main account.
- Think about what you are wearing on camera AND WHAT IS BEHIND YOU!
- It is extremely important that you find nice lighting in your house (but filming outside is always preferred)
- For tips on how to make your Instagram stories really shine, watch some of the tutorials in the **#tutorials** channel.

Accounts to follow, esp for their Stories examples:
- @world – global news for young audiences, from BuzzFeed >> fastest growing news account in Q3 2018. Taking cues from accounts at BBC, posting international news, which is undercovered by U.S. outlets currently
- @nowthisnews – national news for young audiences
- @thelilynews – Super creative visuals, made mostly with the IG camera tools
- @refinery29 – Best in class creative execution

Submitting multimedia elements

For each story or post, you will be uploading multiple images or videos directly to Instagram.

Since there could be edits, we are asking that you upload to **@MediaWise_TFCN**. The password for the account is **#mediawise123**.

Use Instagram's built-in features for graphics and text. (Here is a video on how to upload and create Instagram stories.)

To get your creative juices flowing, here is an Instagram Story School from Instagram.
Here is a step by step guide on creating some interactive story features.

After all of your videos are uploaded to the story, **add them to a new highlight** labeled with your name and the date. It is important that you remember to make your story a highlight, especially if you upload your footage over the weekend!

Be sure to tag the appropriate accounts, locations and include any relevant hashtags. We will handle cross posting your stories to the main MediaWise accounts.

Compensation/Time Commitment

You will be paid in the form of a [Amazon e-gift cards](#) for each fact-check you complete that we send you after your fact-check is published.

$25 for a text-only fact-check [MediaWise blog on Poynter's website]
$25 for writing an Instagram script
$25 filming an Instagram script [Filming your teammates script or filming a script for another team]
$30 for writing *and* filming an Instagram fact-check independently
$15 for writing and filming a fact-check TikTok

To help you plan your schedules and how this work will fit in with your school commitments, this is our rough estimate of how long each type of post will take after your story has been approved:

Full insta story: 5 hours
  - [Is this #10YearChallenge post about #ClimateChange legit?](#)
Abbreviated insta story: 2-3 hours
  - [Does Elon Musk really want to send a team to Mars to rescue the Opportunity Rover?](#)
Insta feed post: 1-2 hours
  - [Was that really Justin Bieber eating a burrito the wrong way?](#)

Payment is not contingent on time spent per fact-check, it's about the final product.

Attending office hours

Each week we will have open office hours in a Google Hangout to talk about a different topic relating to journalism and fact-checking.

Office hours give us a chance to talk about what you're working on, offer advice and give tips. These Google Hangouts can be extremely beneficial to you, which is why we encourage you to attend as many as you can. While you are not required to tune

into all 10 sessions, **each teen fact-checker must sign up and attend at least two (we hope you will attend more!)**.

We understand that the timing of the office hours will not work for everyone. We will send out a Slack poll to see when is the best time for everyone. These office hours will also be recorded and shared on Slack and saved in this folder in Google Drive.

Congrats! You made it to the end! Please add your name to this Doc acknowledging that you've read the handbook.