Here are ten questions for you to consider as you encounter news and political information in your own life, based on some of the major topics covered in the Teach-Out. Answering these questions can help you determine the likely quality of a news story.

1. Where did I find the article?
As a news reader, you want to make sure that you are encountering information in a variety of different ways. For each story, think about where you first encountered it (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Print, Cable TV, Network TV, Radio, Other).

2. Why do I think it is interesting?
Why you think a particular story is interesting or worthwhile is important for determining its quality. If you found a story simply because of a headline or it was shared by a friend, that does not necessarily imply that the article is high quality.

3. Have you heard of the source?
Different media sources have different reputations, which confer varying levels of credibility onto the information they provide. Sources with strong reputations are usually credible, or are at least likely to correct inaccuracies they report, whereas sources with less of a reputation may be less likely to fact-check the information they provide.

4. What kind of story is it?
Certain kinds of informational stories tend to convey more accurate and neutral information than others. Traditional journalistic news -- such as beat reporting and investigative journalism involve more rigorous fact-checking than breaking news and opinion pieces. These also tend to be more accurate than blog posts, partisan pieces, and satire.

5. What kinds of sources does it reference?
Good journalists rely on multiple sources when reporting their stories and tend to focus on official sources (e.g. government spokespersons) and issue experts. When a story relies heavily on anonymous sources, laypersons, non-experts, or partisan commentators, however, the quality of the reporting is often more difficult to discern.

6. What is the ideological orientation of the story?
The highest quality information tends to at least attempt to balance information from the political left and right. If a story only uses sources from one side or only presents one side of an issue, that is a big red flag.

7. How accurately is the story presented?
Because it is easy to mislead people with inaccurate headlines, it is important to check that headlines match the content of an article and that they are not sensationalized “click-bait.”

8. Do other outlets report something similar?
One of the best ways to assess the quality of a story is to see if other outlets are reporting the same thing. If you find that multiple high quality outlets independently report a story, that suggests that the story is accurate. If you can’t find a story reported elsewhere, that is a bad sign.

9. Does the story reinforce what you already believed?
Because we are all subject to various cognitive biases, we should be particularly worried about encountering news that confirms our existing beliefs. While it is true that our beliefs are often correct, we should exercise additional scrutiny when considering information that we are predisposed to agree with.

10. Does the story have an explicit call to action?
News is designed to be informational. If a news story tells you to take some particular action, that is a worrisome sign about its quality.

Given the answers to these questions, what is your assessment of the likely quality of this information?

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