

**Get  
REAL!**

**DIGITAL  
MEDIA  
LITERACY  
TOOLKIT**

Community Engagement Partnership to educate, engage and empower us about media and body image in the digital media culture

California State University  
**Northridge**

 **NEDA**  
Feeding hope.  
National Eating Disorders Association

## ***Get REAL! about Media and Body Image*** **A Digital Media Literacy Toolkit**

In our media saturated culture, it is hard to escape the onslaught of messages about our bodies – messages that can make us believe that reshaping our bodies to attain a certain “ideal” can bring us happiness, success, and popularity. Instead these messages can affect our body image and self-esteem, and, in some cases, lead to unhealthy eating and exercise behaviors, even eating disorders.

To help counteract media’s potential influence on normalizing unrealistic body standards, students from California State University, Northridge (CSUN) partnered with the National Eating Disorders Association on a civic engagement project to create a ***Digital Media Literacy Toolkit***. CSUN students from the Department of Journalism collaborated with peer educators from Joint Advocates on Disordered Eating (JADE) at University Counseling Services to research, develop, and design a toolkit to ***educate, engage, and empower*** their friends, family members, classmates, and other students at high schools, colleges and universities.

The ***Get REAL! Toolkit*** features interactive activities to think critically about the body image messages we see, hear and read in the digital media culture every day. Some of these messages are created by the media industry, advertisers, and celebrities who perpetuate unhealthy retouched body images in photos and products they endorse. Others we create ourselves -- along with our friends and people just like us – when we email, text, tweet, post, pin, like, and share online.

We invite you to ***Get REAL!*** and use the toolkit to test your media literacy skills, find out what your digital footprint tells about your body image, and let people know where you stand on media’s picture-perfect body images. Take the body positive pledge to move beyond the cultural ideal body standard for muscular men and thin women, and give a social media shout to support celebrities who speak out against retouched, picture-perfect photos of themselves.

Let’s use our media literacy skills to advocate for change and shift the spotlight from limited and artificial body ideals to more diverse and authentic body shapes and sizes that reinforce healthy lifestyles.

Lynn Grefe  
President and CEO  
National Eating Disorders Association

Bobbie Eisenstock, Ph.D.  
Faculty Mentor, ***Get REAL! Project***  
California State University, Northridge

## *Acknowledging the Get REAL! CSUN Community*

**Get REAL! about Media and Body Image** is a community service-learning partnership between the National Eating Disorders Association and The Office of Community Engagement at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that emphasizes “learning by doing” – students apply what they learn beyond the classroom, collaborating with a community partner, to develop civic responsibility and empower themselves as citizens who actively participate in the world in which they live.

Every semester for the past few years, more than 100 students enrolled in Women, Men and Media courses I teach in the Department of Journalism participate in the project. They learn digital and media literacy skills, study research about media and body image, and reflect on media’s influence on their self-image. They then apply what they learn to help themselves and their peers think critically about media’s role in cultivating an “ideal” body standard that contributes to a drive for thinness among women and for muscularity among men. The centerpiece of the project is the **Get REAL! Digital Media Literacy Toolkit** on the NEDA website. This social media-driven toolkit is also used by CSUN peer educators from Joint Advocates on Disordered Eating at University Counseling Services in their presentations to campus groups and classes across the disciplines.

The toolkit would not have been created without the passion and dedication of all my students, especially the volunteer leaders who spearhead the project each semester. Special thanks to Jennifer Luxton who guided the original mission of the project and designed the toolkit, Karina Elias who created the social media, Shira Moskowitz who served as our resident expert and researcher, and the rest of the team who developed the activities: Edgar Barillas, Katie Barnett, Chardanay Crowder, Jasmine Edelin, Alaya McKinney, Natalie Palacios, Stefani Romagnoli, Josue Silva, and Therese Stoppiello. Their successors, Cicely Chisholm, Teja Foster, Melisa Fumbarg, Autumn Gomez, Kaitlin Nagao, Leilani Peltz, Michelle Tobbi, and Andreas Stoltz produced a PSA, and Meaghan Gallagher, Melanie Miulli, Nathan Rillo, and Sarah Angello developed a strategic media plan and press kit for the project. The students are truly amazing in what they accomplish each semester to make the toolkit a reality!

Every project has an invisible support system and this one is no exception. Thank you to Joyce Burstein, Faculty Director of The Office of Community Engagement, who is an enthusiastic supporter of the project. Thanks also to Veronica Sullivan, Ph.D., psychologist at University Counseling Services, who served as our invaluable consultant about eating disorders. And thank you to Linda Bowen, Chair of the Department of Journalism, who has been a proponent of service learning and my projects. Last, and certainly not least, a triple thank you to Lynn Grefe, Susie Roman, and Maggi Flaherty for the opportunity to collaborate with NEDA and bring digital media literacy skills to the forefront of the body image discussion.

For many years now, I have been privileged to teach a diverse body of students who have taught me as much as I have taught them. Service-learning opportunities like **Get REAL!** enrich their academic experience and inspire them to use the power of their voices to take social action that can make a difference in their lives and the emergent global digital society.

Bobbie Eisenstock, Ph.D.  
Faculty Mentor, **Get REAL! Project**  
California State University, Northridge

# Your Digital Footprint

## What does your digital footprint tell about your body image?

With every mouse-click, you leave behind a digital trail of what you do, where you go, and who you know online. Your digital trail creates a digital footprint of your online identity that increases in size every time you post, share, and search online. Your online identity can tell a lot about your body image.

This activity will help you see yourself in the digital world. Follow your digital trail by copying and pasting, or simply making a list, of the items below, and insert them into the footprint.

### Write down:

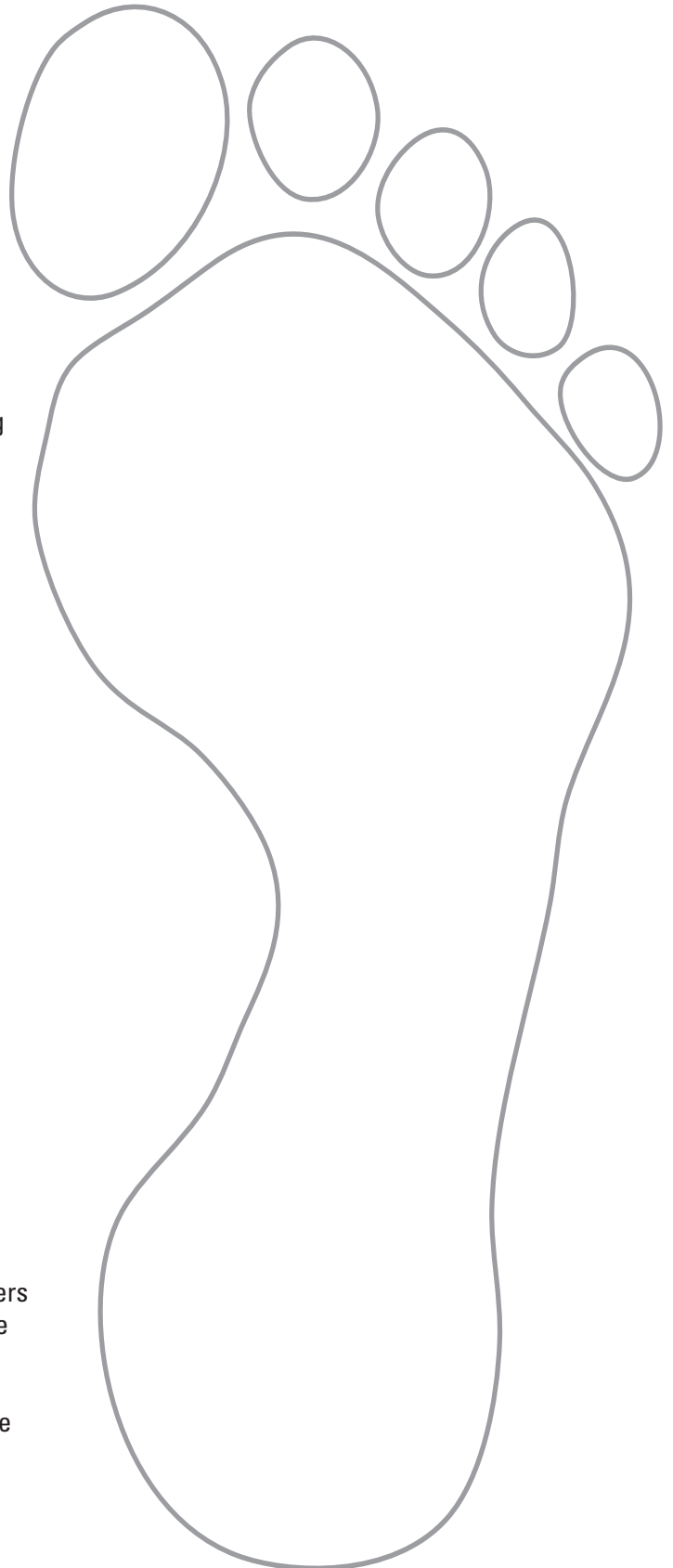
- User names for email/twitter/etc.
- Favorite websites/social media/apps
- Who you follow on twitter
- Websites you visit
- Recent Google searches
- Title of your blog (if you have one)

### Copy and paste:

- Profile pictures and selfies
- Your "About" page: interests/likes/blurbs
- Shared or tagged photos and videos
- Typical posts/tweets
- Pages you "like"
- Groups you join
- Events you attend
- Ads that appear on your webpage
- All of your profiles/groups
- Pinterest board: posts and those you follow
- Instagram photos/Vine videos

### Reflect:

Reflect on what you see in your digital footprint and how others might view you. Does your online identity reflect who you are in real life? What does it say about your body image? Is this how you want others to perceive you? Talk to your friends about their digital footprints and take some control—delete the negative posts and pictures and leave the positive ones.



# Digital Body Image Quiz

## How Concerned Are You About Your Body Image?

There can be lots of pressure to look and act a certain way, particularly when you feel that others are judging you. The photos you share, tag and comment on send a message about your body image. What's your message?

Take the Digital Body Image Quiz. Answer the questions **YES** or **NO**. Count up your **YES** and **NO** responses. The more you answer **YES**, the more concerned you are about your digital body image. *You may be more susceptible to media's influence than you realize!*

**1** I care about how I look online and will un-tag or delete a photo if I think I don't look good.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**2** When I choose my profile picture, I only select photos where I look my best.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**3** Whenever I video chat, I make sure I look good, and if I don't, I will not accept the request or cover the camera.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**4** I like when people "like" or comment on the way I look online.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**5** I comment on my own appearance online and can be very judgmental.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**6** I comment on my friends' photos and tell them if they look good or not.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**7** I might retouch or edit a photo of myself to enhance my appearance.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**8** I like to read fashion blogs and browse celebrity sites to check out how they look and what people are saying about their appearance.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**9** I sometimes post selfies that are extra flattering or revealing with the intention of getting positive feedback.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**10** I compare my body or my weight to others based on pictures I see online.

**YES** ..... **NO** .....

**TOTAL**      **YES** ..... **NO** .....

### Reflect:

How do you feel about your digital media habits after taking this quiz? If you're too concerned about your digital body image, make some changes—spend less time looking in the digital mirror and more time interacting with friends offline and pursuing a healthy, active lifestyle!

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# Body Positive Pledge

**Take the Body Positive Pledge and let people know where you stand on picture-perfect body images in the media.**

- I promise to move beyond society’s ideal body standards and embrace my own body.
- I promise to tell myself one positive thing about my body every time I look in the mirror and appreciate that I am original and there’s only one me.
- I pledge to respect my body and not try to fit media’s image of attractiveness.
- I promise to keep a healthy and active lifestyle for myself and no one else.
- I pledge not to judge people based on their body shape and size, especially if they do not fit the cultural body ideal.
- I pledge to be proactive about negative body images and challenge unrealistic and demeaning body talk.
- I pledge to advocate for positive body image messages—that includes not to buy from companies or support organizations that use unrealistic and unattainable body ideals to sell a product or promote a cause.
- I pledge not to retouch my photos in order to enhance my appearance online.
- I pledge to become more media literate and think critically about what I see, hear and read, especially on social media.
- Finally, I pledge to love my body unconditionally.

**Sign here:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Take Action**

Here are two ways to spread the word—make sure to use the hashtag #ipledgetogetreal.

- 1. Choose at least three promises and share them on your social media accounts.**
- 2. Post an unretouched, unfiltered image of yourself along with a link back to this toolkit.**

**Reflect:**

How did your social media followers react to your pledges? How do you feel about your unretouched, unfiltered selfie?

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# Celebrity Shoutout

## Use social media to support celebrities against unrealistic body standards.

As a face of the media culture, celebrities play a key role in setting society's standards of attractiveness. Media producers often use special lighting, makeup, camera tricks, and Photoshop to try to make celebrities look as "perfect" as possible. They do such a good job that you may not even notice what they've done to achieve this flawless look.

Some celebrities are speaking out and fighting back against retouched images that unrealistically change their appearance. Shout Out! to support them and encourage others to speak out!

### How to Shoutout

- When a celebrity calls out unrealistic body images, let them know you applaud what they did and share it with your friends and social media followers.
- When celebrities don't speak out, urge them to take a stance, especially if they've spoken out before.
- Use social media to tweet, blog, like, pin or post to keep reminding celebrities that they are role models and need to speak out about unrealistic and retouched body images.

**Check out some of our examples.**



@ddlovato gets a shoutout for talking about the reality of eating disorders. Thank you for taking a stand. #getrealCSUN #CelebrityShoutOut



Shout out to Jennifer Lawrence for calling out society's ridiculous beauty standards! #GetREAL #CelebrityShoutOut



Shout out to Lady Gaga for slamming her own overly-photoshopped Glamour magazine cover. #getrealCSUN #CelebrityShoutOut [huff.to/1cMinvA](http://huff.to/1cMinvA)

### Shoutout Tips

- Be specific in your shout out about body image.
- Use hashtags such as #keepitreal and #celebrityshoutout to share your message and get the campaign to go viral.
- Always use positive language and be respectful and encouraging. The more positive you are, the more likely you are to be re-tweeted, liked or re-pinned.

# Media Literacy Quiz

## How media literate are you?

- 1** What are media?
  - a. TV, movies, magazines, newspapers, video games, music, radio, and advertising
  - b. social networks, photo and video sharing websites, and other online content
  - c. a and b
- 2** What is the main purpose of advertising?
  - a. to inform people about new products and services
  - b. to let people know about a product's benefits and where to buy it
  - c. to make money for the company
- 3** What effect does exposure to picture-perfect thin women and muscular men have on people?
  - a. It can cause eating disorders.
  - b. It can affect body image and self-esteem.
  - c. It has no effect.
- 4** What can you do if you see something objectionable in the media?
  - a. Just ignore it because it probably only bothers you.
  - b. Just accept it because there is really nothing you can do about it.
  - c. Let the people responsible for the message know how you feel.
- 5** How can you try to look like the women and men you see in ads?
  - a. You can't achieve this look because they don't look like that in real life.
  - b. Make sure to follow a healthy diet and exercise.
  - c. Use the product that they are advertising.
- 6** How can you combat unrealistic ideal body standards in the media?
  - a. Become aware of the techniques used to create these images.
  - b. Think critically about the underlying meaning of the message.
  - c. a and b
- 7** What makes someone susceptible to fashion magazines' influence on body image?
  - a. If they have low self-esteem.
  - b. If they compare themselves to the models and celebrities.
  - c. a and b
- 8** Who creates media messages?
  - a. People who work for large corporations that own the media we use
  - b. People who use media to text, tweet, post or share information online.
  - c. a and b
- 9** Who is susceptible to media's influence on body image?
  - a. Everyone
  - b. Children who watch a lot of TV
  - c. Young women with eating disorders
- 10** How can you be sure that videos and pictures you post online are viewed by only people you want to see them?
  - a. Make sure your password is a combination of letters and numbers so you can't be hacked.
  - b. Set your account to "private" so that only friends can view your profile
  - c. There's really no way to ensure that what you post online stays private.



# Media Literacy Answer Key

## How media literate are you?

- 1 **The correct answer is C.** The term media refers to any type of communication that reaches a wide audience. Media include traditional forms such as TV, radio, and magazines, as well as new media such as social networks and other digital content.
- 2 **The correct answer is C.** While advertising is used to inform people about products and services, as well as the products' benefits and availability, the main purpose is to make money for the company by selling its products to consumers. It's important to remember that advertisers may not always have the consumers' best interest at heart because their main goal is to be profitable.
- 3 **The correct answer is B.** While exposure to these images doesn't directly cause eating disorders, research does show that it can negatively impact both body image and self-esteem, which for some people can lead to an increase in disordered eating and unhealthy exercise behaviors.
- 4 **The correct answer is C.** Chances are if a particular ad bothers you, it bothers others as well! Don't just sit back and take it – there are a number of ways you can talk back to the media creators. Organize a letter writing campaign or use social media sites to speak your mind (who knows, maybe it will even go viral!).
- 5 **The correct answer is A.** For the majority of ads you see, the image has been digitally altered to the point that not even the original model looks like the image portrayed. No amount of diet, exercise or beauty products can make someone look this way because it is a digitally-created image and not real life.
- 6 **The correct answer is C.** To become media literate is to be able to be both aware of the techniques used to create media images and to analyze and evaluate the underlying meaning of these messages. You can then understand exactly what media are trying to sell, to whom, and how it might affect different consumers.
- 7 **The correct answer is C.** While no one is immune to how fashion magazines can impact body image, studies show that those with low self-esteem and those who base their self-worth on social comparisons are particularly vulnerable to these images.
- 8 **The correct answer is C.** While you may not realize it, we are all media creators! Every time you send a text or post on Instagram you are creating media. Next time you post something online think about: Is the media you create consistent with your values? Does it promote a healthy body image? Is this a "digital footprint" you can be proud to leave?
- 9 **The correct answer is A.** While you may think only young people or females are susceptible to media's influence, media can impact everyone's body image given the unrealistic and often-limited portrayals of diverse body shapes and sizes.
- 10 **The correct answer is C.** Unfortunately, even with passwords and privacy settings, there is really no way to ensure that what you post online will stay private. Everything you share online becomes part of your "digital footprint" and may be viewable by others at some point despite your best efforts. Keep in mind that the Internet is a public space so if you wouldn't want your teachers, your boss or your grandmother to see it, think twice about posting it!

# Media and Your Body Image

## In our media-saturated culture, it's hard to escape the onslaught of messages about our bodies.

Media messages tell us how we should look and feel and sell us ways to achieve it, pressuring us to diet and exercise, even take supplements or undergo surgery, to attain the media culture's ideal body standard. Learn to think critically about unhealthy body image messages.

Every time you see advertisements, watch TV, videos or movies, read magazines, listen to music, and go online, question and challenge messages about body image.

### Who created the message and why?

- Who wrote and produced the message?
- What is the purpose of the message — to entertain, persuade, inform or make money?
- Who paid for and profits from the message?

### What techniques are used to create the message?

- What words or images got your attention?
- If models or celebrities are featured, do they really look like that?
- Are the bodies airbrushed or altered in any way?

### What values, beliefs, and lifestyles are represented?

- What is the message about appearance, weight and food?
- What body shape and size does it suggest is desirable?
- What does it suggest to do to achieve that look?
- Is the information accurate and true? What's not said or left out?

What you see, hear and read in the media will not cause eating disorders, BUT can influence YOUR body image, make it hard to feel good about your body shape and size, and lead to weight and food issues.

### How might different people interpret the message?

- How might the message make people feel about their body?
- How might a person with weight or food issues interpret the message?
- What expectations might someone have about different size people?

### What does the message mean to you?

- How does it make you feel about yourself and your body?
- Does the message make you want to change something about yourself—your looks, eating habits or exercise routine? Is this positive or negative?
- If you could remake the message, what would you do?

Media tell females:  
thinner is better

Media tell males:  
muscular is better

Voice YOUR opinion about body image  
CRITICIZE unhealthy messages  
COMPLIMENT healthy messages

Adapted from the media literacy framework developed by the Center for Media Literacy at [medialit.org](http://medialit.org)

# Media Literacy Key Questions

CORE CONCEPTS	KEY QUESTIONS TO ANALYZE MEDIA MESSAGES
Media messages are constructed	<p>Which medium is used to create the message? (TV, movie, radio, music, magazine, newspaper, book, video game, advertising, billboard, Web site, social network, video/photo sharing, IM, text, e-mail, twitter, blog, and other social media, etc.)</p> <p>Who wrote, edited, designed, produced, and distributed the message? Media professional? Medical expert? Blogger? Celebrity? Or anonymous? Did you create the message? Or is the source someone you know or admire? Friend? Online acquaintance? How credible is the source? Who is the intended target audience? How do you know?</p>
Each medium uses its own creative techniques, interactive features, and software to construct messages	<p>What techniques are used to create the message? What features are used to get the audience's attention? (images, photos, language, slogans, headlines, layout, sarcasm, humor, emoticons, colors, fonts, video, animation, avatars, music, lyrics, sound effects, camera angles, lighting, Photoshop, celebrity endorsement, interactivity such as likes, hits, retweets) If models or celebrities are featured, do they really look like that? Are bodies or faces airbrushed or altered in any way? How can you tell?</p>
Media messages are produced for particular purposes, usually to make money	<p>Why was the message created? Is the purpose to entertain, educate, inform, persuade, and/or make money? How does the purpose affect the content and how it is communicated? Who owns, pays for, and profits from the message? Who might benefit? Who might be harmed?</p>
Media messages have embedded values, points of view, and lifestyles	<p>What does the message really say about body image and health habits? What underlying values are implied about positive and negative body ideals, appearance, weight, diet and exercise? What lifestyles are portrayed? What body shape and size does it suggest are desirable? What does it suggest to do to achieve that certain look or lifestyle? Is the information accurate and true? Fact or opinion? What body shapes are left out? What is not said that might be important?</p>
People understand the same message in different ways based on their individual skills, beliefs, and experiences	<p>What do different people take away from the message? How might a person with weight or food issues interpret the message? How might it make someone feel about his/her body – a person who is too thin or too heavy, happy with his/her body or preoccupied with body image, overly concerned about what to eat, in recovery from an eating disorder? How might certain beliefs, attitudes or prejudices about weight, diet and exercise affect a person's understanding of the message? What expectations might someone have about different size people? How might people interpret the message differently based on their age, gender, sexual orientation, education, race, ethnicity, religion, political ideology, ability, appearance, prior experiences?</p>
Media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process	<p>What does the message mean to you? In what way does the message reinforce or conflict with your beliefs and attitudes about body image? How does it affect your knowledge about a person or health concern? How does the message make you feel about yourself and your body? Does the message make you want to change something about yourself – your looks, eating habits or exercise routine? Is this positive or negative? How might it affect how you relate to other people and they relate to you? What actions can you take to promote positive body images? What can you do to spread the word and advocate for change?</p>

Adapted from the media literacy framework developed by the Center for Media Literacy at [medialit.org](http://medialit.org)

# Media Literacy Worksheet

How media literate are you? Use the media literacy core concepts and key questions to deconstruct a message about body image from any media you use: TV show, movie, video, magazine article, advice column, celebrity interview, advertisement, infomercial, video game, music, blogs, text, tweet, profile photo, selfie or social networking sites.

KEY QUESTIONS	
Who constructed the message?	
<p>What are the creative techniques, interactive features, or software used to create the message?</p> <p>Do people really look that way?</p>	
<p>What is the purpose of the message?</p> <p>Does the purpose affect how the message is communicated?</p>	
<p>What are the embedded values, points of view and/or lifestyles represented in the message?</p> <p>What is left out of the message?</p>	
<p>How might people interpret the same message in different ways? Why?</p> <p>How might the message make someone feel about themselves?</p> <p>How might the message make someone feel about other people – friends, classmates, family members, someone they see at the store or online, etc.?</p>	
<p>What does the message mean to you?</p> <p>Does it reinforce or conflict with your beliefs about positive or negative body image? Does it make you want to change something about yourself?</p> <p>What can you do to promote healthy and more diverse body images in media?</p>	

Adapted from the media literacy framework developed by the Center for Media Literacy at [medialit.org](http://medialit.org)

# Letter Writing Guidelines

## Get REAL! about body image

Everywhere we turn, advertisers bombard us with messages about our bodies. Most ads attempt to sell us ways to achieve picture-perfect thin or muscular body “ideals” that can have a powerful effect on how we see ourselves and feel about our bodies – even leading to unhealthy eating and exercise habits to try to conform to this unrealistic body standard. Few ads promote positive body messages that reinforce a diversity of body shapes and sizes, body acceptance, and healthy lifestyle choices.

How can we combat body-negative messages and support body-positive ones? One way is to talk back to advertisers about the messages they send to consumers. Voice your concern by writing a letter to either compliment advertisers that promote positive body image or criticize advertisers that foster negative body image to sell products.

In your letter, let advertisers know how you feel about the body ideal represented in the ad, what you like and don't like about the techniques they use and the message they promote, and what you plan to do about it. Tell them whether you will stop purchasing a product because of its negative body image or endorse a product because of its positive image.

Remember: You are a consumer with buying power! Use your economic clout to voice your opinion and your social networking capital to create buzz and spread the word to family, friends, and social media followers!

## Guidelines:

### Select an ad.

Select a recent advertisement concerning body image that you think is praise-worthy or protest-worthy.

- Choose the ad from any print, broadcast or online media outlet – magazine, TV show, billboard, website, social media, app, etc.
- Don't limit your selection to ads for fashion, cosmetics and grooming. Messages about body image can be found in ads for food, vitamins, tech gadgets, cars, travel, furniture – virtually any type of product.

### Analyze the ad.

- *What is the message about body image?* Examine what the ad actually says about body image. The best way to do this is to think of the ad as telling a story that you need to interpret. Some advertisers use a straightforward approach and feature the human body, often sexually objectified, while others more subtly embed the message in the image or text, sometimes without the human form.

*Ask yourself:* Is the human form visually depicted in the ad or is there an underlying message about body image in the text or image? Does the message make you feel that you need to look like the model or celebrity in the ad to be attractive, popular, happy or successful? Does the ad make you worry about a problem that can be solved by using the product? Does it claim that the product can improve your appearance or reshape your body? Does it boast that the product is

the best one to give you the results you want? No matter what the approach is, make sure to consider what's left out of the message because what's omitted is just as important as what's included.

- *What techniques are used?*

Advertising messages about body size, shape, and appearance use many different techniques to get consumers to buy and use the product.

*What to look for about body image:*

retouching or digital manipulation, body shaming language, celebrity endorsement or testimonial, body buzzwords, exaggerated claims, emotional appeals, product shape, camera angles, close-ups, special lighting, music, sounds, colors, fonts, slogans, background and setting, as well as interactive techniques that enhance the image, request your feedback on social media, and target future ads based on your online searches and personal profile.

- *Who is the target audience?*

Identify the target audience for the ad. Ads that “sell” ideal body image don't only target women and girls. More and more are directed to men and boys. Look for ads that attempt to appeal to males as well as females of all different ages and consider the potential influence on the audience.

*How to identify the target audience:* You can usually tell who the target audience is by the product itself and where the ad is placed – teen magazines, women's or men's magazines, TV program genres such as sitcoms, dramas, talk, reality or quiz shows, types of websites, social media apps, etc.

- *Where and when did you see the ad?*

Make sure to specify where the ad appeared and when you viewed it. If you have the original ad, photocopy, or picture you took with your smartphone, attach it to your letter. Then there is no mistake about which ad you are writing about.

*What to include:* If you saw the ad while reading a magazine, include the title of the publication, issue date, and page number. For TV commercials, state the title of the show, network, and date viewed. If the ad appeared online, let them know what you were doing online and include the name of the website, URL, date viewed, and type of ad (video, pop-up, etc.). Don't forget about billboards while driving and let them know when and where you saw them.

- *Who is responsible for creating the ad?*

Research the companies, groups or agencies responsible for the ad production, and the product manufacturers or retail outlets.

*What information you need:* Search online for contact information, including specific names, titles, and addresses of people in charge at the parent company and media outlets where the ad appears, as well as agents for celebrities who are featured in the ad. You will need this information to write your letter.

**Continued** →

### Write your letter.

- When you write your letter, address it to the people in power responsible for the ad message and include your key points: why you are writing the letter, what the ad message says about body image, where and when you saw the ad, what influence it might have on the target audience and others who might view it.
- *Spread the word:* voice your opinion to media outlets that distribute the ad, companies or retail stores that sell the product or service, media divisions and professional organizations that monitor standards and practices, government agencies—such as the Federal Trade Commission—that establish content guidelines and regulate advertising policy, advocacy groups concerned about the issue, and high-profile celebrities who can make a difference.

### Make sure you:

- Use standard business letter format.
- Address your letter to a specific person and not “to whom it may concern.”
- Type and proofread your letter to check that it is free of typos, spelling, grammar and punctuation errors that can detract from what you want to communicate.
- Check out our **Tips** and **Sample Student Letters** before you write your letter.

## Tips

Always keep in mind why you are writing, who will be reading your letter, and what they already know.

- ✓ Be clear: state the purpose of your letter.
- ✓ Be concise: don't be wordy.
- ✓ Be courteous: be polite.
- ✓ Be correct: no typos, grammar or punctuation errors.

*Opening paragraph: get right to the point.*

- ✓ Clearly tell them why you are writing.
- ✓ Keep it short, no more than two or three sentences.

*Body or second paragraph:*

*state your viewpoint with conviction.*

- ✓ Back up your purpose for writing the letter with more details about why you like or don't like the message or image in the ad.
- ✓ Tell them what specific actions you plan to take and that you will urge family, friends, co-workers and social media followers to do the same.
- ✓ Let them know if you are a loyal consumer and what they need to do to win back your business.

*Closing paragraph: wrap it up.*

- ✓ If your letter is critical, encourage them to make changes.
- ✓ If your letter is complimentary, encourage them to continue doing what they're doing.

*One more thing:*

**Remember, there is strength in numbers!** If there is an advertisement you feel strongly about, organize a letter writing or social media campaign with your friends, your classroom, your club or organization to let that company know how you feel.

# Letter Writing Examples

Month, Day, Year

[Your return address]

Stacie Bright  
Unilever Senior Communications Marketing Manager  
Unilever United States, Inc.  
800 Sylvan Avenue  
Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632

Dear Ms. Bright,

I am writing you in regards to the Dove Find Real Beauty Campaign and the Dove Self-Esteem Project. I believe that what you are doing through this campaign will be able to successfully redefine the standard of how women and beauty are looked at in the media and you have my full support.

Too often in magazines, television, and movies we are flooded with images of photo shopped models that are meant to represent the ideal in physical beauty. The problem is that these rail then models are representing an unrealistic ideal of beauty that was created by advertisers to sell health and beauty products to the masses of women. These women try and fail to look like the models that they see in magazines. As young girls encounter these images, they begin to feel that they are not good enough because they unable to achieve this idea of perfection.

This is why I am such a supporter of Dove products and your goal to rebuild the self-esteem of both women and young girls. The Dove Real Beauty Campaign and the Self-Esteem Project are a beacon of light among an advertising market that is saturated with negative and unrealistic portrayals of women. Not only will I personally continue to buy Dove products as a way to help you and your partners reach your goal of providing 15 million girls with self-esteem programming, but I will also encourage my friends and family to do the same as well. I also plan to stop using other health and beauty brands that use photoshopped models to sell their products. Please extend this positive activism to your other brands, such as Axe. Axe is renown for its stereotyped images of the ideal woman. By sharing your body-positive message with this product's consumers, you'll reach a broader audience who can help further this cause.

I believe that Dove is doing an immeasurable service for women and young girls. It is time that we start building our self-esteem as real women and as the Dove goal states: begin to look at beauty as "a source of confidence, not anxiety." Keep up the great work!

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]



Month, Day, Year

[Your return address]

Joseph V. Tripodi  
The Coca-Cola Company  
DUN 500  
P.O. Box 1734  
Atlanta, GA 30301

Dear Mr. Tripodi,

I am writing to express my disapproval of one of your latest advertisements for Coca-Cola Soda, titled "Be Okay". I understand the advertisement was pulled in the United Kingdom, and if it is not pulled or amended in the United States, I will encourage people, via my social network, to boycott your product.

I am targeting this particular advertisement because of the dangerous behavior it encourages. The advertisement shows people engaged in various activities, paired with the amount of calories the activity burns. At its core, this behavior can be categorized as bingeing and purging as well as extreme exercising, both of which are performed by people with eating disorders. If your goal of the advertisement was to show that the soda should be consumed guilt-free, then there would be no need to imply that the calories should be burned immediately. The behavior that your ad is suggesting is also dangerous for people recovering from eating disorders who already feel extremely hesitant when consuming regular foods. Seeing commercials like this can cause a relapse and encourage the dangerous habits that you are glamorizing in your advertisement. If this advertisement is not removed from all outlets, Mr. Tripodi, I will use every online networking tool available to encourage my followers to boycott your product. I will also contact singer Demi Lovato, a survivor of bulimia, and inform her of the harmful messages your advertisement is sending. My involvement with the Get REAL! Project and the National Eating Disorders Association will ensure that the fact that your company is promoting negative body image is spread nationwide.

Your commercial can very well plant the seed that starts an eating disorder or breaks the progress of someone recovering from one. So in conclusion, Mr. Tripodi, in your position as Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing and Commercial Officer, I urge you to pull this commercial off the air and off of the internet because of the body-negative message it sends to consumers and to a society that is bombarded by millions of advertisements on a daily basis.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

# Letter Writing Examples

Month, Day, Year

[Your return address]

Nick Robertson, CEO  
ASOS  
Greater London House  
Hampstead Road  
London NW1 7FB UK

Dear Mr. Robertson,

Fashion can be a cutthroat business where eating disorders are encourage and celebrated. Many average sized girls like me are used to not being able to relate to the models or expect the clothes to fit or look the same. However, it's nice to see that a popular and trendy story like ASOS can promote positive body image. I am writing to commend you on your work and for proving that there can be diversity in bodies in fashion.

ASOS has always been a place I loved to shop and after taking a college class that explores sexism in the media I appreciate your company even more. The clothes are amazing and your online presence with social media is innovative, captivating and really inspiring for someone like me that hopes to get into advertising and public relations someday. I did some research and I'm even more pleased by ASOS. They have a clear point on how they try to fight against the dangerous trends in the industry. It makes me happy to know that what I'm looking at is really what I'm looking at. I especially commend ASOS for their Model Welfare policy and their guidelines on digital manipulation. The digital manipulation is very important to me, especially when online shopping because some stores can change the color and the cut of an item and when you get it, it's nothing like you imagined. That has never happened to me at ASOS, and if I had all the money in the world, you should know a good portion of that would be spent at ASOS.

I've never seen a site with such beautiful plus size models, I had to do a double take. Then I learned that ASOS was shortlisted in the Body Confidence Awards in 2012 and that just made me be even more proud to be your customer.

I understand how easy it is to take short cuts, to make it easier and just Photoshop a model, or allow eating disorders to occur for the good of a superficial image. I respect that in the fashion industry ASOS doesn't allow it. This proves that having good body image doesn't have to be something that taught in school or encouraged by your parents and teachers, it can be rather trendy and cool. Thanks for making me feel better every time I shop; I'm a customer for life!

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

Month, Day, Year

[Your return address]

daniel.avery@logostaff.com

<http://www.newnownext.com/underwear-advertisements-recreated-with-real-men/09/2013/>

Dear Eric Shorey,

I stumbled upon your “Ads-Recreated” that you posted September 2013 and was completely blown away and inspired by what you have done. The average male is too often shunned and replaced with unrealistic images of what a man should look like - chiseled abs, strong jawlines, and limited or no hair at all - but you have replaced each of these ads with the average male, someone not only I but the rest of the world can relate to.

To be perfectly honest, I did not believe that the unrealistic body image that advertisers were portraying had any effect on me. I would flip through magazines and laugh or scoff at what a man was supposed to look like. But after viewing your recreation and looking at the pieces next to their originals, it was a breath of fresh air. Not only did I like the recreations better, but I also related to them. In some ways, more or less, those men look just like me - hair in odd places, flab here, flab there, and even some blemishes that were never touched by photoshop. I love it! I plan to show this to my “Men and Women in Media” class in hopes to that it may speak to some other males in the classroom.

I hope to see more recreations. You’ve definitely inspired me and countless others.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Month, Day, Year

[Your return address]

Michael S. Salaman, Chairman  
Skinny Water  
1100 Hector Street, Suite 391  
Conshohocken, PA 19428

Dear Mr. Salaman:

I am a student at Cal State Northridge currently involved in the Get Real service-learning project along with other staff and students. As a team we are working on counteracting media's potential influence on body image. Your company is among one of the many negative influences on teens, both female and male, as well as adults.

Your line of Skinny Water and the advertisements that are run are appalling to all women alike. Slogans like "Skinny always gets the attention," "Live the skinny life" and "Strut your skinny" send a very negative message to all who see it. For both women and men, it implies that the only kind of women who are desired and worth attention come in just one body shape and size: skinny. We both know that there is a multitude of body shapes out there, yet your company and product line refuses to represent them.

You are potentially causing women to feel guilty and unsatisfied with their body. Zero guilt reads on a Skinny Water bottle. Why should women feel guilty at all for not being skinny? Instead of bringing down the individuals who choose to buy your drinks and support your business, why don't you try to build their self-esteem and empower them?

After reading your press release, I believe your company has a lot of positive potential. I can see that you are concerned about the obesity and diabetes epidemic in this society, but I am here to tell you that your execution is all wrong.

As an unsatisfied consumer, I am boycotting all that you represent in addition to the products you sell. I will not buy any of your products until you take action, rework and reword your advertisements, and incorporate women of all sizes. You must change your pitch: the product name, the captions in the advertisements, and the negative body ideals you represent. I will also make sure to get my friend, coworkers, family, and all of the Get Real staff to discontinue the purchase of any of your products. I am adamant about spreading the word.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

## ***Digital and Media Literacy Resources***

***NEDA's Get REAL! Digital Media Literacy Toolkit*** is a resource to help think critically about media and body image, talk back to media about unrealistic body image messages, and advocate for transparency and celebrating our natural looks, body sizes and shapes in the digital media culture. Here are a few more media literacy resources to help become less vulnerable to media's influence on body image.

### ***About-Face***

[www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org)

About-Face provides women and girls media literacy tools to understand and resist harmful media messages that affect their self-esteem and body image, and encourages them to take action by contacting media-makers to criticize negative messages and praise positive ones.

### ***Center on Media and Child Health @ Children's Hospital Boston***

[www.cmch.tv/mentors\\_teachers/lp\\_index.asp](http://www.cmch.tv/mentors_teachers/lp_index.asp)

The Center on Media and Child Health offers media literacy lesson plans about body image and other health-related issues for teachers and parents to mentor children in developing critical thinking skills when they use media.

### ***Center for Media Literacy***

[www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)

The Center for Media Literacy is the pioneering media literacy educational organization in the United States that developed the MediaLit Kit, a collection of media literacy resources featuring professional development and curricular materials focusing on an expanded vision of literacy for the 21st Century.

### ***Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media / See Jane***

[www.seejane.org](http://www.seejane.org)

Geena Davis Institute and See Jane, its programming arm, are at the forefront of changing female portrayals and gender stereotypes in children's media and entertainment. In partnership with USA Today Education, See Jane developed a series of media literacy lessons focused on gender, self-image and equality.

### ***Girl Scouts***

[www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org)

Girl Scouts is the largest organization for girls in the world whose mission is to foster girls of courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place. Media literacy skills are a key component of Girl Scouting's newest Leadership Journey Series *It's Your Story—Tell It!* to get girls to think critically about the media and promote positive and healthy images of women and girls.

### ***Girls Inc.***

[www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org)

Girls Inc. Media Literacy program increases girls' awareness of the scope and power of the media and its effects on girls and women. Girls learn to analyze media messages about appearance, the narrow definition of beauty, sexual behaviors and substance use, create media that are more realistic and reflective of their lives, celebrate positive role portrayals, and advocate for change in entertainment, news, and advertising.

**GlobalGirl Media**

[www.globalgirlmedia.org](http://www.globalgirlmedia.org)

Global Girl Media is dedicated to empowering high school age girls from underserved communities around the world through new media leadership and journalistic training to bring their voice to the global media stage and shape their own futures.

**Media Education Foundation**

[www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org)

Media Education Foundation produces and distributes documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical thinking about the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media. Several films address body image issues, including *Still Killing Us Softly 4*, *Beauty Mark: Body Image & the Race for Perfection*, and *Sext Up Kids: How Children Are Becoming Hypersexualized*.

**Media Literacy Now**

[www.medialiteracynow.org](http://www.medialiteracynow.org)

Media Literacy Now is a non-profit organization focused on sparking state-wide grassroots and legislative activity to get broad-based, comprehensive media literacy education into schools as a matter of policy.

**MediaSmarts**

[www.mediasmarts.ca](http://www.mediasmarts.ca)

MediaSmarts is the website for Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy that provides a comprehensive collection of media literacy information and educational resources for families, schools, and communities.

**National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)**

[www.namle.net](http://www.namle.net)

NAMLE is a national membership organization dedicated to advancing the field of media literacy education in the United States through networking, research and scholarship, and the NAMLE Marketplace that features an extensive selection of media literacy resources powered by Amazon.com.

**Proud2Bme**

<http://proud2bme.org/>

Proud2Bme is an online community created by and for teens that covers everything from fashion and beauty to news, culture, and entertainment—all with the goal of promoting positive body image and encouraging healthy attitudes about food and weight.

**SPARK Movement**

[www.sparksummit.com](http://www.sparksummit.com)

SPARK is a girl-fueled movement that trains girls 13-22 to be activists and leaders in the fight against media's sexualization of women and girls. The movement collaborates with more than 60 national organizations to reject the commodified, sexualized female images in media and support the development of girls' healthy sexuality and self-esteem.

**The Representation Project**

[www.therepresentationproject.org](http://www.therepresentationproject.org)

The Representation Project is a movement that uses film and media content to expose injustices created by gender stereotypes and to shift people's consciousness toward change. The project includes the media literacy-based curriculum and documentary *MissRepresentation*.