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**THE ABC BOOK OF MEDIA LITERACY**  
**NEWS MEDIA FINLAND**



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## THE WORLD IS CHANGED WITH INFORMATION

Traditional media keeps an eye on rulers, defends citizens and sounds the alarm over injustices. Journalists are usually involved when dishonest or neglectful politicians, authorities or company leadership are brought to justice.

The media has revealed leaders who harass their subordinates and teachers who do the same to their students. Journalists have dug into environmental crimes in the mining industry, reported companies that use forced labour, and revealed child abuse in religious communities, and the abuse of the elderly in medical care institutions. There are many examples, and each one has made the world just a little bit better.

Journalism does more than just unmask injustice, but that is what it is best known for. We need reliable media, vigilant journalists and fact-based communication. We also need media literacy to be able to distinguish facts from false information. This ABC will be your guide to the world of media skills!

## **WHAT IS THE ABC BOOK OF MEDIA LITERACY?**

Is juicy gossip a good news item? Why is freedom of expression such an important part of democracy? Why does false information spread so much faster on social media than in newspapers? Critical media literacy is the ability to understand, evaluate and use media correctly. When you are aware and alert, you will not be fooled. And when you know what is actually happening, you can influence the functioning and development of society.

Media literacy is a skill that you can practise. In your hands, you hold a book that will help you navigate your way through the media world and figure out if information published on social media or elsewhere is credible. With the ABC, you will learn how to identify trustworthy journalistic articles from among a wide range of content.

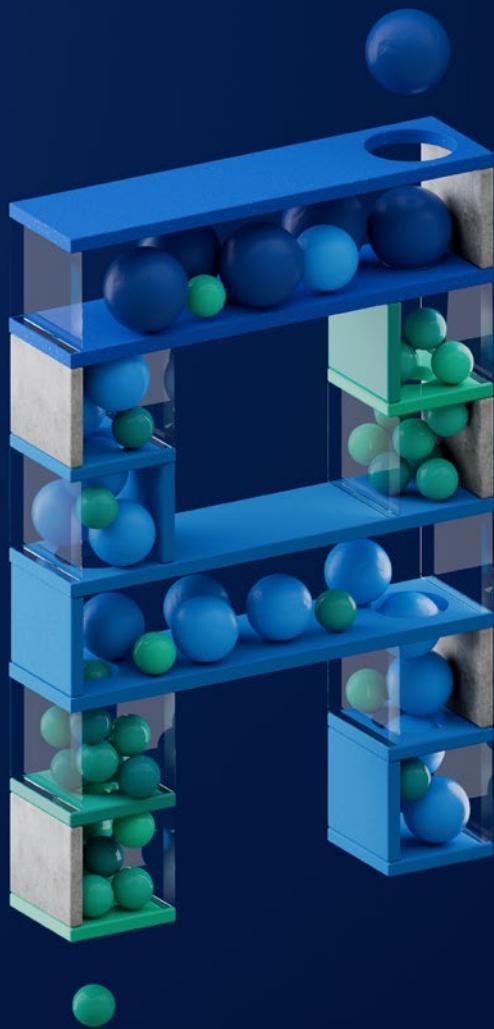
Once you have mastered the alphabet, discuss, ask and question – always.

# A

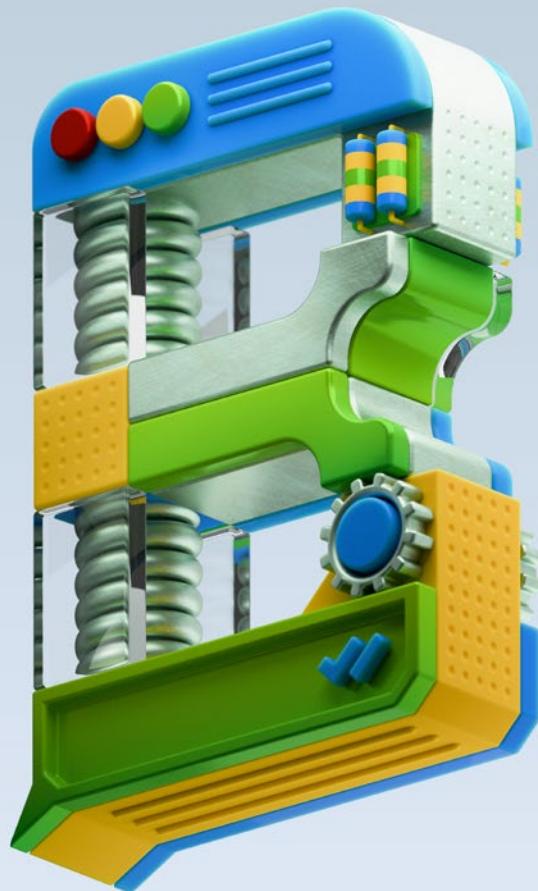
**LGORITHM** An algorithm is like a recipe that a computer follows. When someone reads news online, browses social media or listens to music, the content is selected according to their preferences and interests.

Algorithms make it easier to find information in the sea of data, but as the perspective becomes narrower, biases and prejudices can also become stronger. In journalism, algorithms are used, for example, in tailored news recommendations and voting aid applications.

Journalists should know how algorithms work, and it is good to communicate their use openly. Data giants such as Google and TikTok have been criticised for keeping their algorithms a business secret.



BOT



# B

**OT** is short for robot. It refers to software that automatically performs repetitive and predefined tasks. Bots often try to imitate human behaviour, but as they work automatically, they are much faster than humans.

Bots are used for many tasks, such as search engine indexing and chat customer service. Robotics can also be used to write news when a quick response is needed. A news bot will find the most important issues in an instant and can be harnessed to write news about issues such as election results in a fraction of a second, as soon as the votes have been counted.

# C

**OPYRIGHT** Copyright means that the creator has the exclusive right to decide on the use of their work. No one else may use the work without the creator's permission. Works can be any original result of the creative work of the creator: written works, photographs, music, videos or even a reportage by a journalist, for example.

Copyright is granted to the creator of the work, and copyright law provides protection against the use of the work's appearance and expression without permission. Ideas or information related to the work, on the other hand, can be freely used by anyone. If you want to use someone else's work, you must agree on it with the creator. Generally, you can get permission for a fee.



## DEMOCRACY

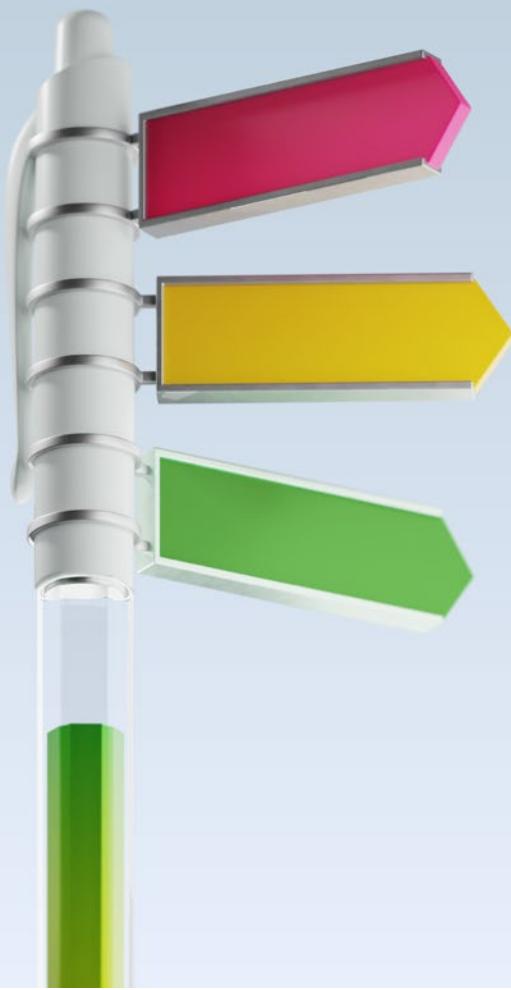


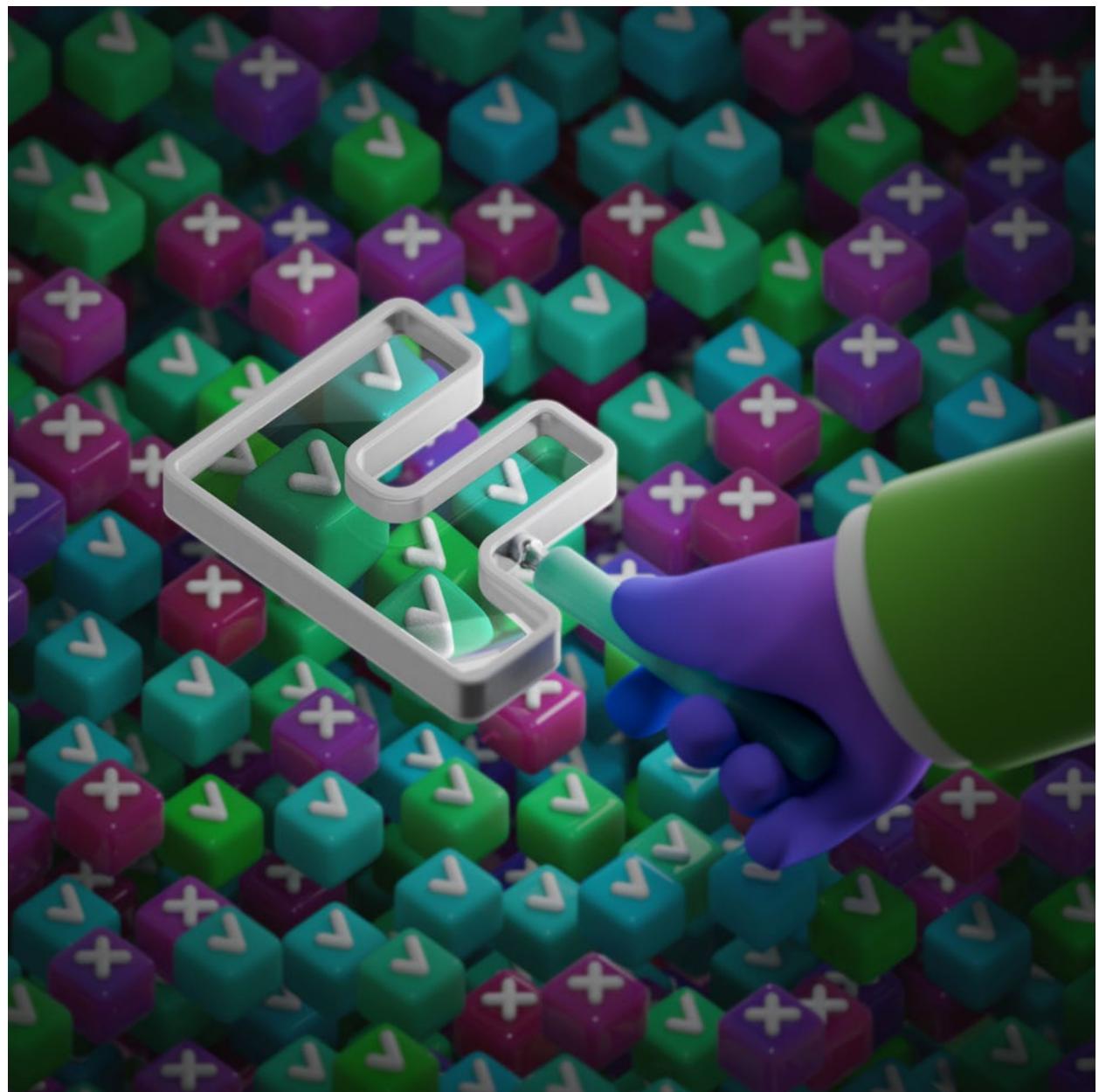
# D

**EMOCRACY** is a social system in which everyone has the right to influence common affairs and to exercise political power. In order for democracy to be fully realised, extensive, reliable and high-quality journalism is needed. It uncovers societal problems and tackles corruption, monitors the actions and statements of politicians and others in positions of power, presents different perspectives and thereby offers people the opportunity to form their own, well-founded opinions.

Open and reliable communication creates the foundation for being a curious, aware, critical and responsible citizen. This is the very foundation of a democratic society.

**E**THICS is a discipline that explores the principles of right and wrong. Reliable journalism, a journalist's responsibility and ethics go hand in hand. The Journalistic Guidelines define the framework for professional ethics for journalists. The guidelines ensure that information is communicated in an honest and responsible manner. Journalists must not abuse their position or focus on perspectives that lead to personal gain. They must also not accept bribery or benefits that could jeopardise their independence. On the other hand, journalists have the right to refuse tasks that they consider ethically questionable.





**F**ACT Credibility and truthfulness are at the heart of journalism. This requires constant fact-checking, and journalists need excellent knowledge acquisition skills in their work. According to the Journalistic Guidelines, all information should be checked as thoroughly as possible, even if it has already been published elsewhere. Journalists must take a critical view of sources and the public must be able to distinguish between facts and opinions in published content. The public and readers have the right to trust that the news and articles are based on facts, even if the reader disagrees with the journalist's conclusions.

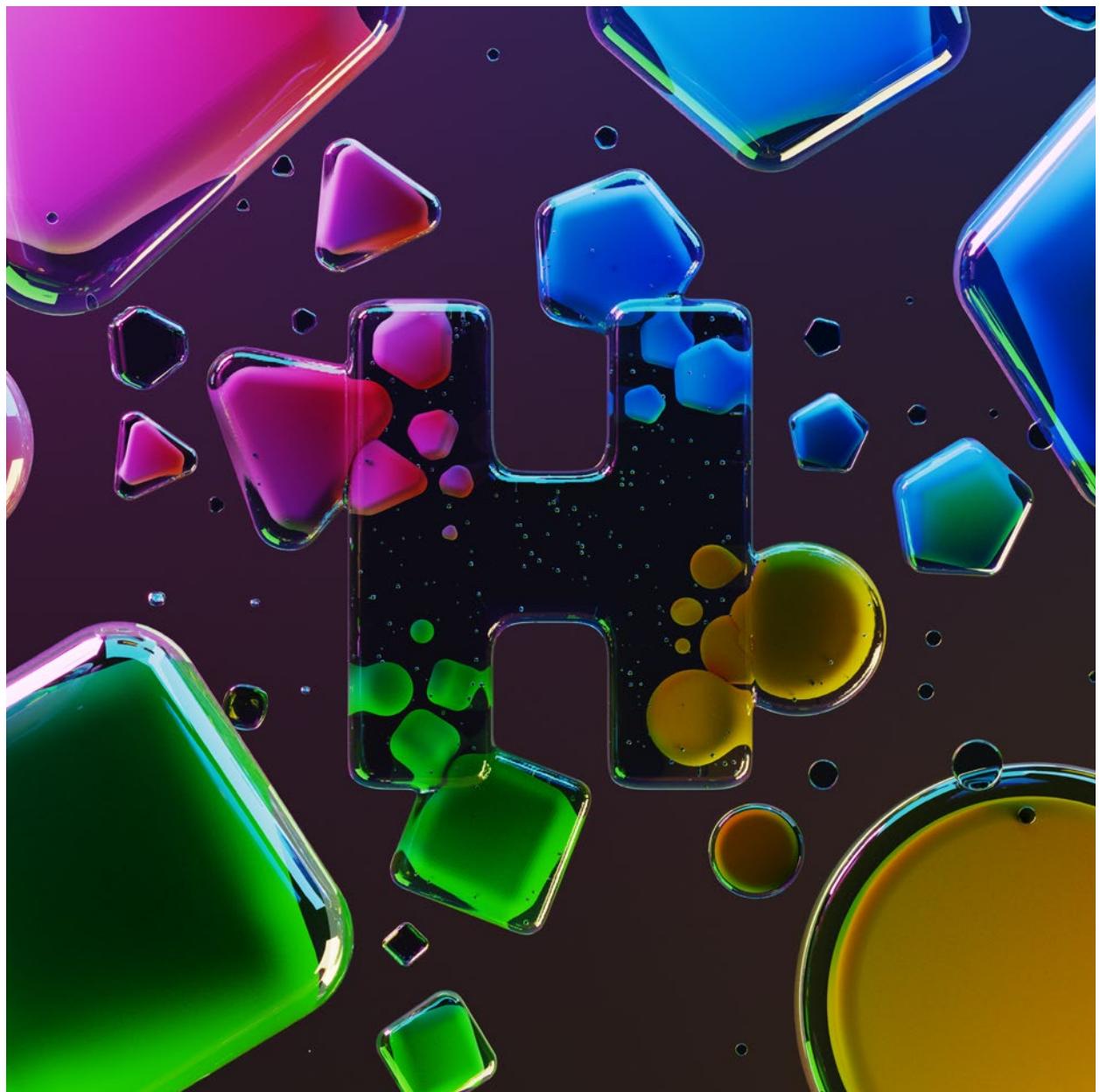


**RAPHICS** In recent years, the importance of visuals has been emphasised in journalism. More and more news and articles are read on the phone, and they often compete for attention with social media, for example. Visually interesting elements such as photos, layout and graphics are becoming more important than before.

Graphics help readers understand complex information and statistics. They can be used to explain phenomena in ways that would not be possible with text alone. Timelines, bar graphs and infographics, for example, provide readers with background information that helps them understand the broader meaning of the news.



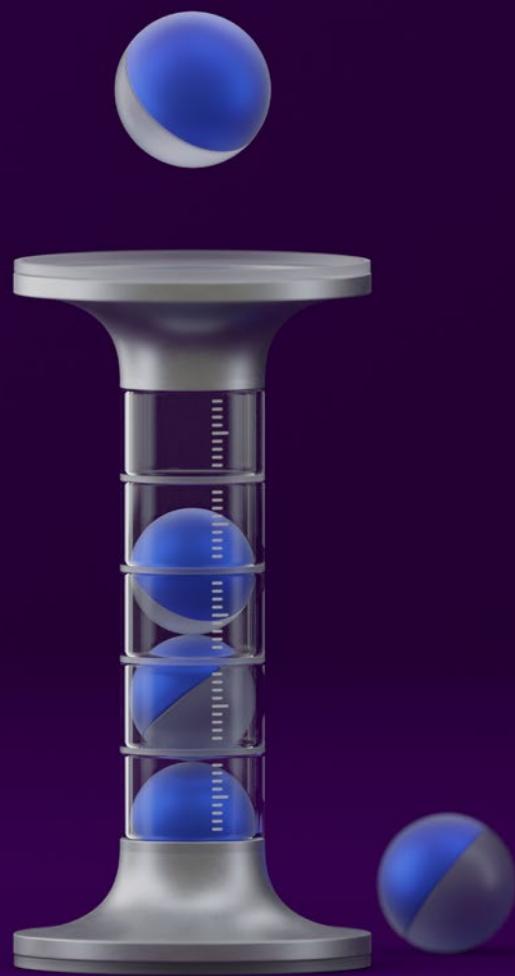
## HYBRID INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

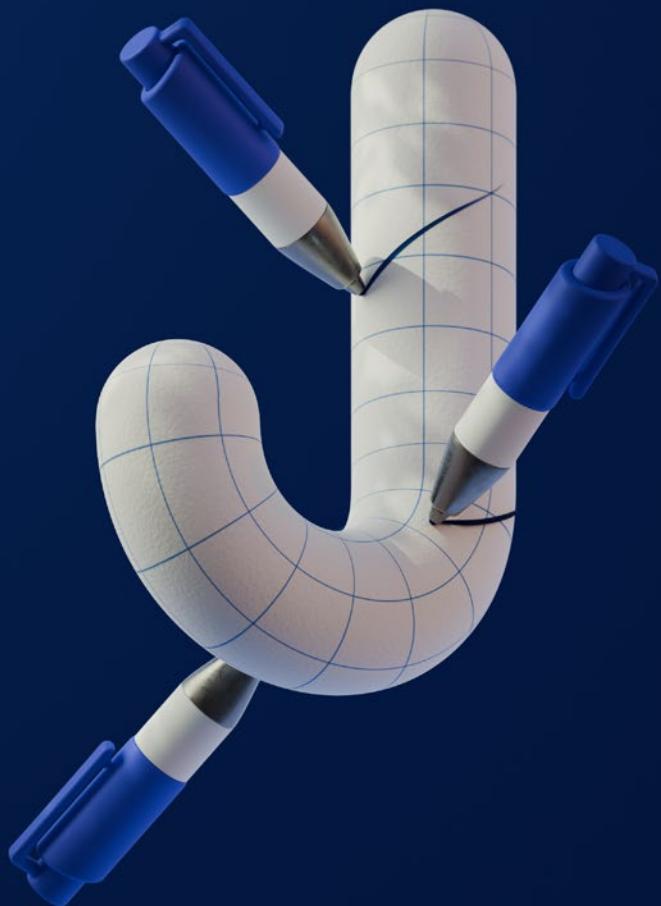


**H**YBRID INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES In hybrid influence activities, a hostile state tries to create a threatening atmosphere, influence the political decision-making of another state and erode democracy – by many different means. It is often done covertly, which makes it difficult to identify and combat. Hybrid influence activities can include, for example, information influence activities, economic pressure and cyber attacks. In today's world, an increasingly common information influence activity is the spreading of misinformation. Its aim is to shape public opinion and undermine trust. Information influence activities can spread effectively on social media, for example.

**INDUSTRY SELF-REGULATION** Many laws, such as the Criminal Code, Constitution, Openness Act and Copyright Act, regulate journalistic work. However, the industry's self-regulation has intentionally been made more stringent in order to minimise the need for official authorities to intervene in the work. This means the freedom of the press will not be jeopardised.

The Journalistic Guidelines have been set out by the Council for Mass Media in Finland, a council established by media publishers and journalists themselves. The guidelines define how freedom of expression must be used responsibly, ethically and with consideration. If someone feels that good journalistic practice has been infringed in the media, they can file a complaint with the Council for Mass Media in Finland.





**J**OURNALISM comes from the French word *jour*, meaning day. The job of a journalist is to obtain, verify and analyse information and to reliably communicate it to people through mass media. Everyone has the right to know. Knowing the facts allows people to better understand reality and form opinions. Investigative journalism creates articles that dive deeper into a topic. They are based on socially significant, possibly secret information.

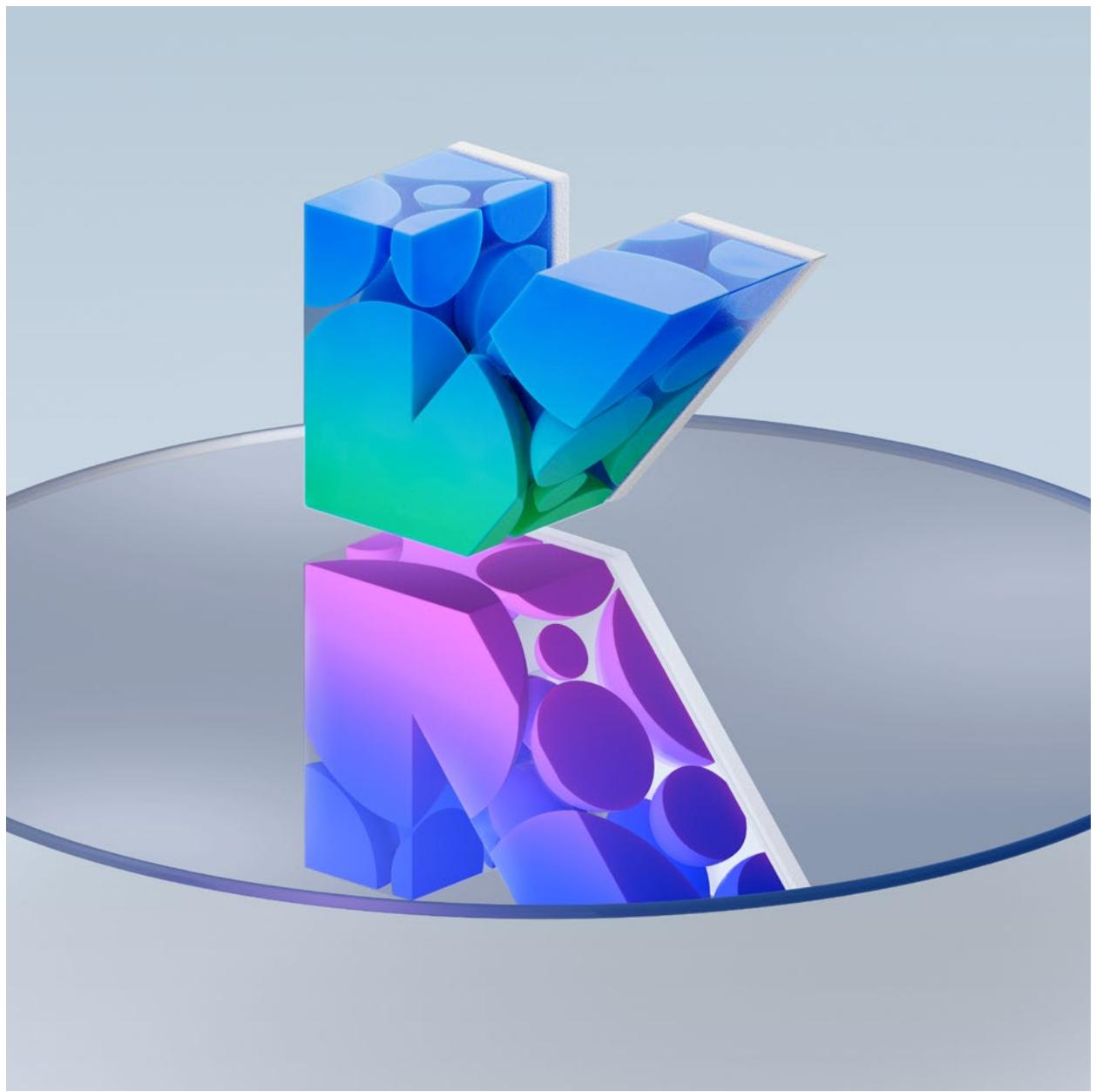
Journalists are the only producers of content who are committed to principles of professional ethics. The Journalistic Guidelines provide guidance on how to use freedom of expression responsibly.

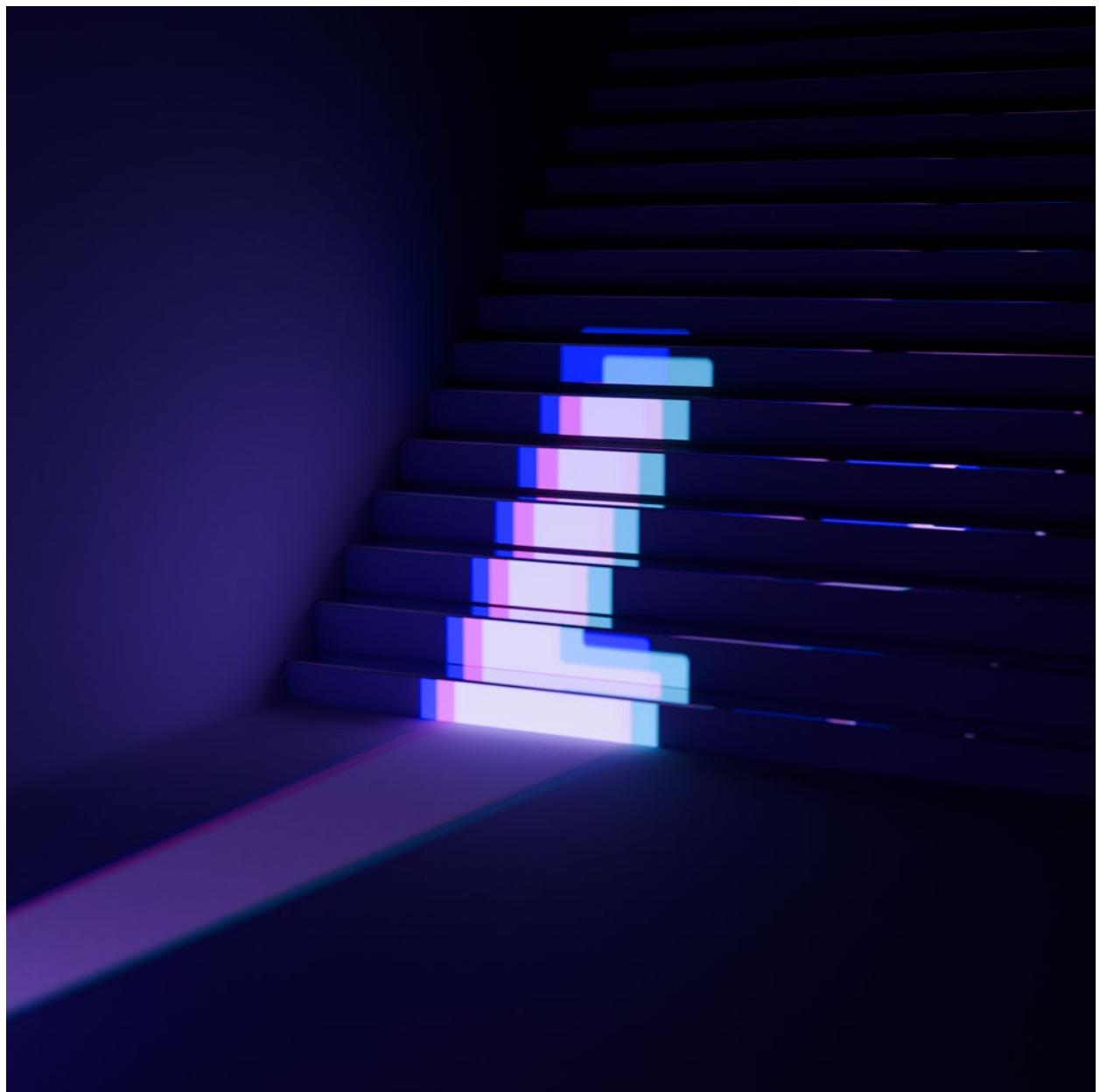
# K

**NOWLEDGEABLE CRITICALITY** In order for journalism to retain its credibility, journalists must constantly exercise healthy criticality.

Hearing a juicy story or reading gossip online is not enough for a news item. A professional journalist always checks the accuracy of a story with at least two independent parties.

Criticality is particularly important in controversial matters – in such a case, the source may adjust their story in order to benefit from the situation. Consumers and readers of the media must also remember to be critical and alert. The lies that spread online are often attractive and seem real.





**L**EGITIMATE SOURCE Credible journalism is based on reliable sources of information. The source can be a person being interviewed, a news item from different media, a press release or some other publication.

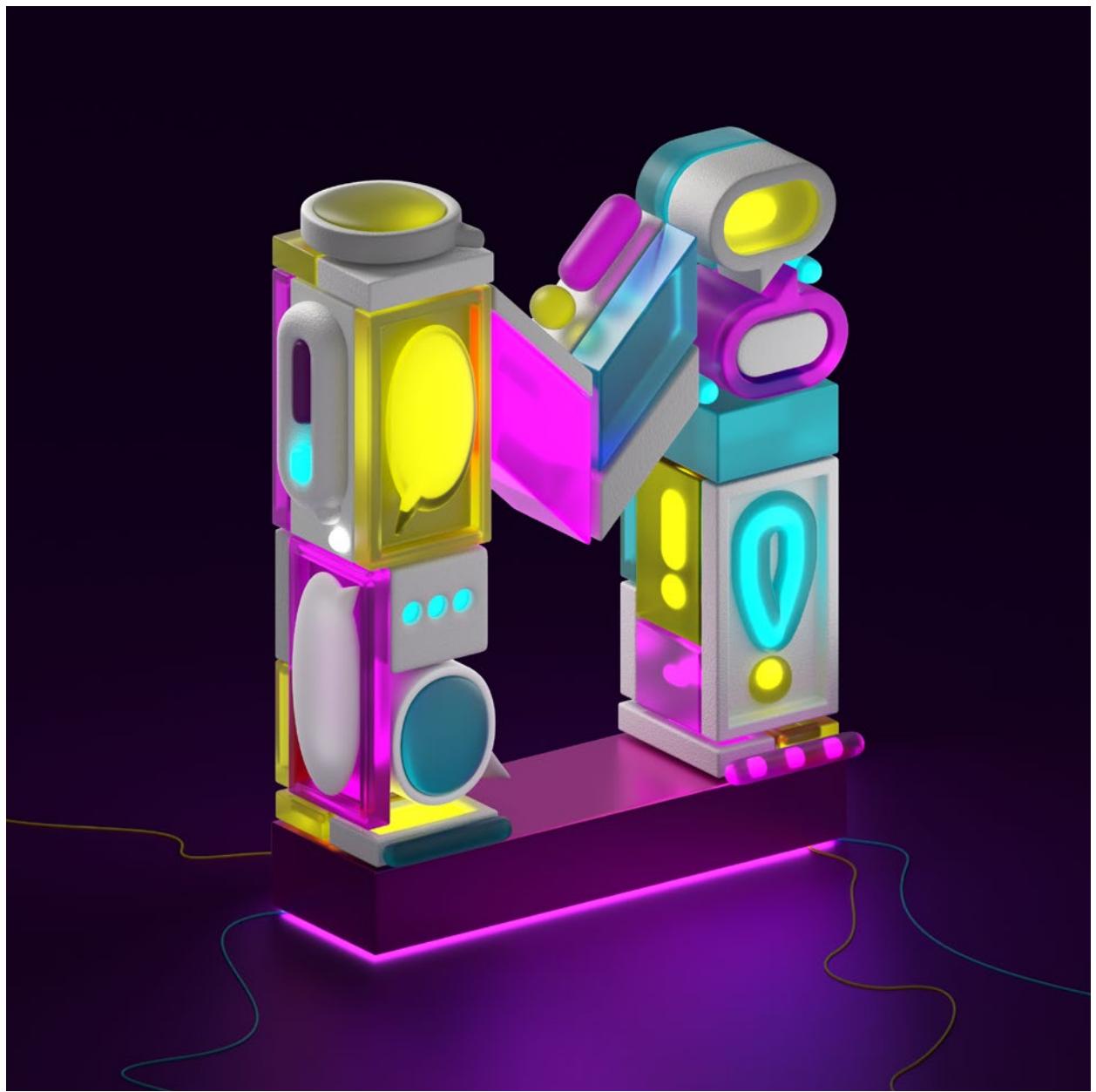
Care must be taken with sources, especially if the matter at hand has been controversial. In such situations, the interviewee may try to benefit from the situation themselves or to harm the other party in the dispute, for example.

Source protection refers to the right of journalists not to disclose who provided the information. If the interviewee has talked about something confidentially, the journalist has the right – and the obligation – to keep the identity of the source a secret, if this has been agreed.

# M

**Y OPINION** In a democratic society, everyone has the right to express their opinion and to receive reliable information and opinion-based perspectives through the media. For example, in journalism, comments, columns and editorials contain the opinions of their authors.

Media content must always be published in such a way that facts can be distinguished from opinions. On the Internet, everyone who wants to speak up can do so, which strengthens democratic equality. The problem here is that anyone can appear as an expert, present their own view as fact, and attract a large number of followers for their message.



## NARRATIVE



**N**ARRATIVE Journalism is increasingly using narrative, that is, storytelling methods. By borrowing the style of fiction, even a difficult subject can be presented in a way that is easy for the reader to understand.

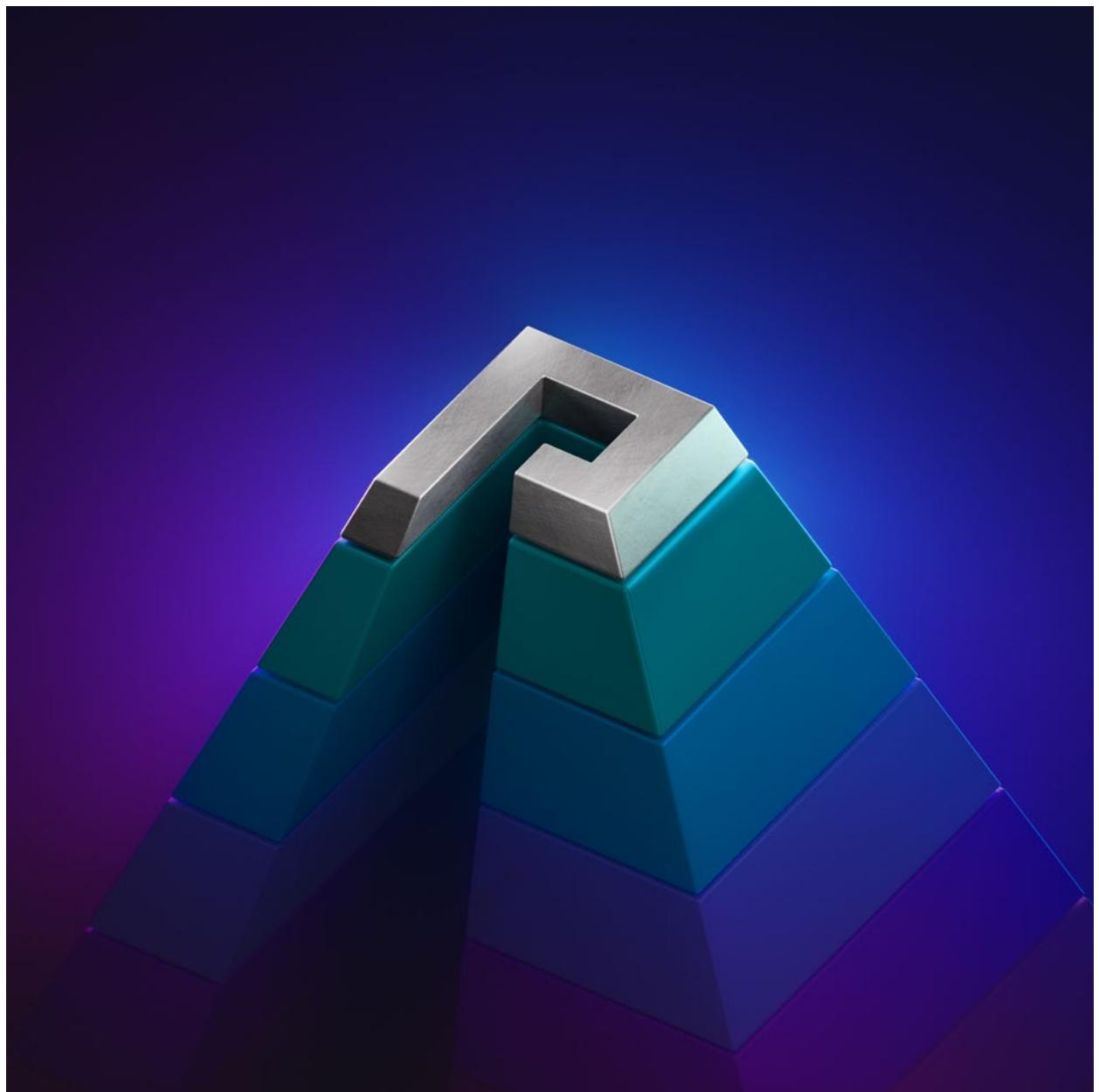
In narrative journalism, language can be used in a more free and personal way than in a formal style of writing. Narratives therefore give journalists artistic freedom, but also require responsibility and a strong commitment to truthfulness and ethical journalistic guidelines. Both the journalist and the reader must be careful not to stretch the facts to fit the storytelling.



**O**BJECTIVENESS The public and readers expect journalism to be reliable – and objective, that is, impartial. In the 1980s, objectivity was still considered the ideal in Finland, but it has later become clear that perfect objectivity is impossible.

All published information is ultimately made by people, and world events cannot be reflected in the media exactly as they are. We always look at things from a certain perspective. Today, it is believed that a good journalist focuses on listening and respecting the views of a wide range of sources and people equally.





**P**RESS AND THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Reliable media always have an editor-in-chief who leads and monitors the editorial office and decides on content. The editor-in-chief is also legally responsible for the published content and correction of errors.

For example, if you compare a newspaper with news spreading on TikTok, there is no such person on social media who would take responsibility. This allows false content to spread. The more openly editors-in-chief and the media they lead communicate and explain journalistic processes to the public, the better they stand out from those who spread disinformation and convey false “facts”.



**&A** In the Q&A (questions and answers) format of social media, an expert or influencer answers questions that have been sent in by their followers on YouTube, Instagram stories or live, for example. The format has found its way into social media from journalism, where question-and-answer stories have been around for a long time. In personal interviews, for example, the text can be formatted as a conversation, alternating questions and answers.

There is a lot of unseen work behind journalistic stories, such as considering backgrounds and questions, as well as interviews. Good interview skills are needed to create an interesting news item or narrative article.



REPORTER INDEPENDENCE



# R

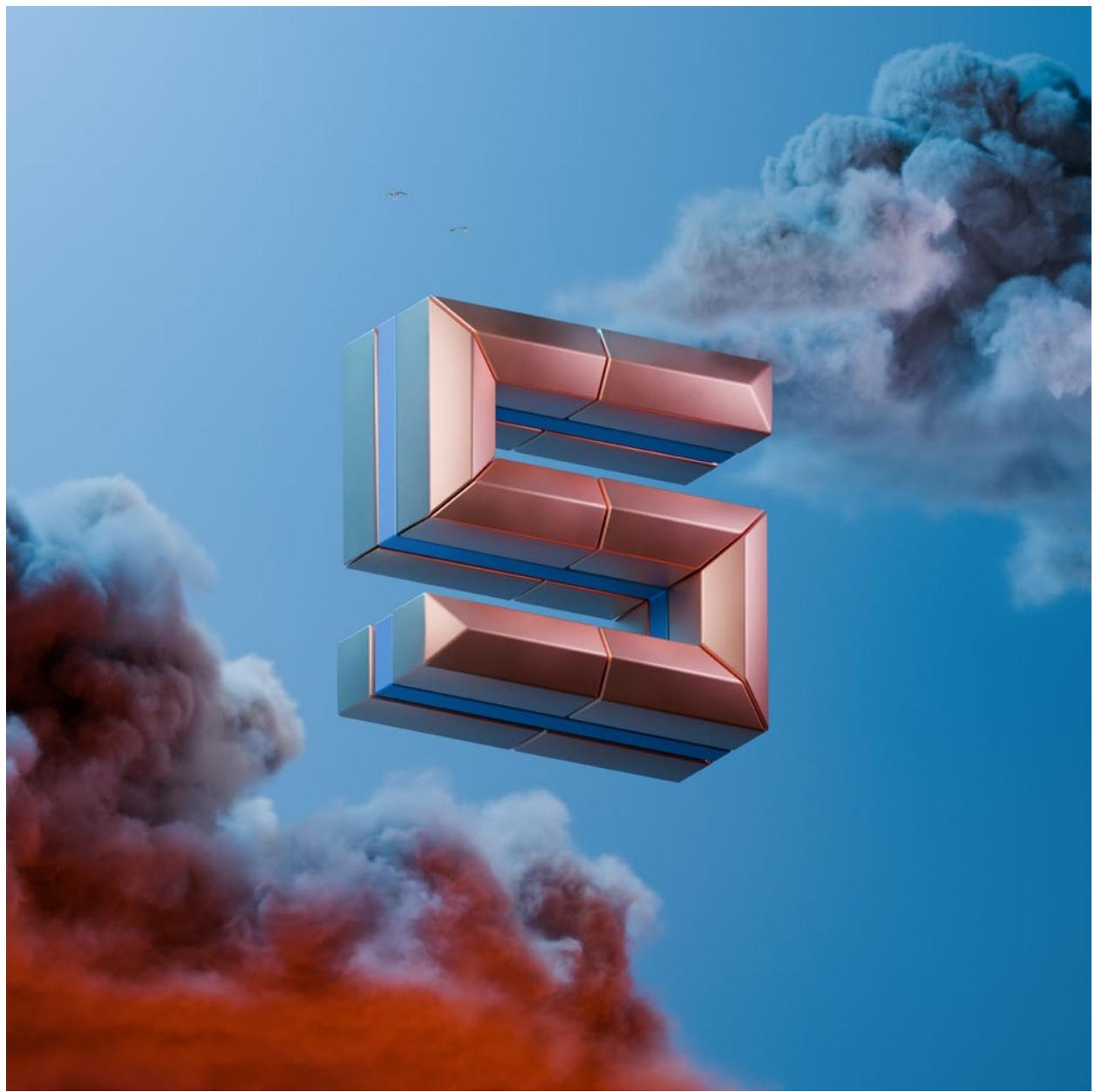
**EPORTER INDEPENDENCE** Independent media refers to media such as newspapers, television and online publications whose choices and perspectives are not influenced by the interests or requirements of the business world or political leaders. Independent media is the cornerstone of any state that is democratic and governed by the rule of law, and plays an important role in keeping corruption to a minimum.

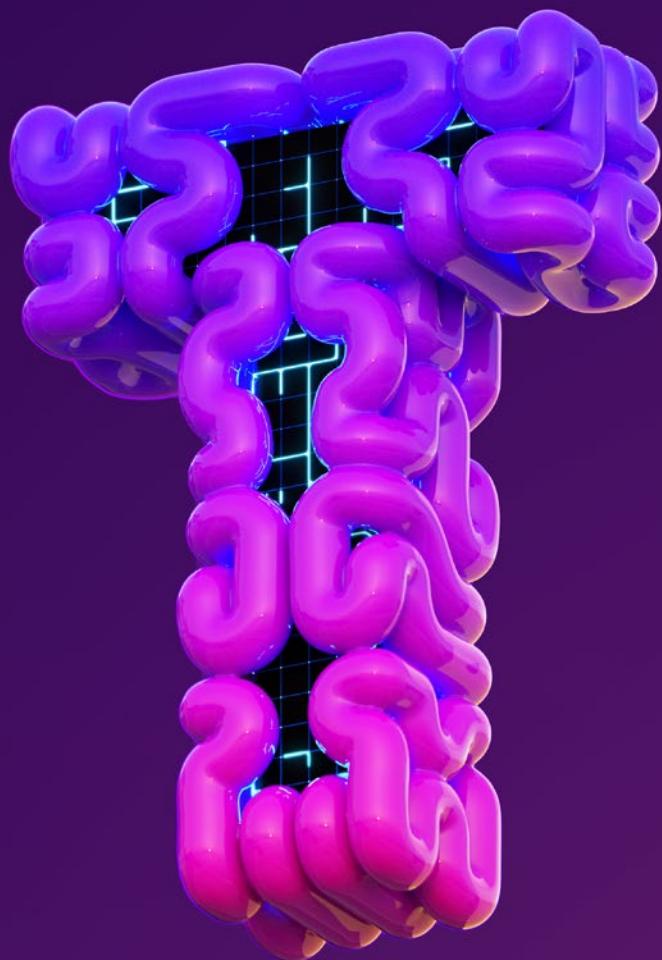
In countries with a high degree of corruption, media independence may be reduced. When pressure is placed on media houses or individual journalists, either directly or indirectly, the aim may be, for example, to suppress the press's criticism of those in power. Journalists have the right and responsibility to refuse any form of pressure or enticement that aims to control or restrict the spreading of information.

# S

**PEECH AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION** Freedom of expression is the foundation of a democratic society. The institution of journalism safeguards the right of everyone to receive information and opinions. Freedom of expression also guarantees everyone the right to participate in discussions and express their opinion without advance censorship and without fear. The press has the freedom to publish provocative and critical content.

However, freedom of expression does not entitle you to write or say absolutely anything – it also entails responsibility. Freedom of expression cannot be used to justify cyberbullying or hate speech against a group of people. In Finland, freedom of expression is protected by the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.





**T**ECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE Artificial intelligence, or AI, refers to the ability of a computer to use human-like intelligence – for example, to write informative text and translate it into different languages, to deduce and to learn. Even though a machine will never replace a journalist, artificial intelligence and the media will collaborate more closely.

Text generated by AI-based services is one source of information among many, and must be viewed critically by journalists. Artificial intelligence also makes factual errors. All in all, the technology makes for a good aid but cannot take the wheel. The content to be published must always be under the control of the journalist, and it is good to communicate openly about the content produced by AI.

# U

**NFOUNDED STORY** An unfounded story, or a canard, is unintentionally false news spread in the media or on social media. It is presented in a way that makes the reader believe the events described. We also talk about spreading misinformation if you inadvertently share information based on incorrect information. This may be due to lack of knowledge or a mistake resulting from carelessness. Disinformation is the deliberate sharing of false information. Malinformation is when the sharing of truthful information is deliberately used to harm an individual, community or state. This could be, for example, the leaking of personal data to the public.



VIGILANT WATCHDOG



**V**IGILANT WATCHDOG In a democratic society, the important role of journalistic news media is to be a reliable provider of information. Another important task of the media is to monitor the actions and statements of politicians and other people in power – be it racist speech or the use of government funds for personal expenses. Critical media can be called a vigilant watchdog – when it is allowed to watch, bark and share information freely, societal matters cannot go unnoticed. Media that freely monitors and reports on public power is also known as the fourth power.

**W**OW EFFECT Journalism's role is to reliably communicate information. A good journalist can make even everyday topics interesting, and at best, important journalistic content creates a wow effect.

Being captivating is also important because competition is increasing in the field of media and especially on the internet. Reliable journalistic content must not be drowned out in the flow of social media and other digital materials. Online, a reader's decision is often driven by the headline alone, which means it is important for it to spark interest – or even a wow effect – right away. In high-quality journalism, the headline always matches the content of the text.





# X

## AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has permanently changed the way people connect with each other. The social media service X (formerly Twitter), Instagram or TikTok can be a place for community discussion and sharing. On the other hand, social media can take up too much of a person's time.

The power of social media also extends to the media. Media houses are becoming increasingly dependent on social media platforms, as that is where more and more people follow and read the news. Social media is also an attractive platform for hate speech and the spread of disinformation – there is no party in the social media environment that takes responsibility for the content.

**Y**OUR OPINION SECTION Although Finland is a model country for democracy, research has shown that Finns would like to participate more actively in social decision-making if this was easier than it is today. While anyone can make their voice heard on social media, newspaper opinion sections still give greater weight to content. An opinion piece is a good opportunity to express your views and spark public debate. Journalistic responsibility and the Journalistic Guidelines also apply to material published in the opinion section. It is the responsibility of the editorial office to check the writings sent in by readers, and any errors must be corrected.





**Z**INE A zine is a self-published, independent magazine or leaflet that can be edited by a single person or a small group. The style of zines is unconventional and rough, and they are often copied for distribution by photocopier. This means that anyone can make a zine. Zines are made for the delight of the enthusiasts of a particular cultural phenomenon and often focus on a specific theme. The content can delve into topics such as politics, art or punk music. Zines are often created using traditional cut-and-paste techniques and can include comics, stories, collage art, poems and interviews.

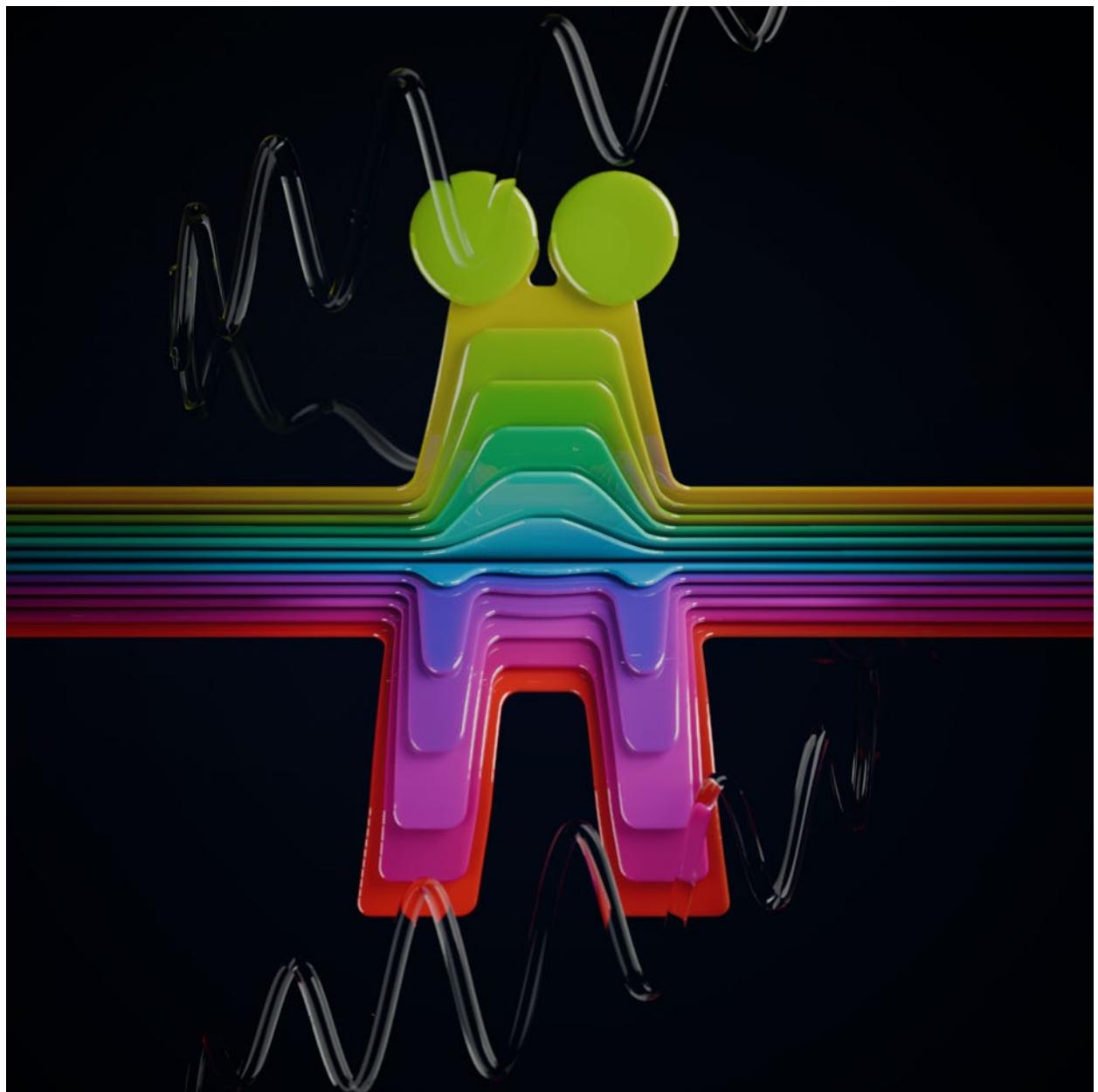
# Å

**LANDSPOSTEN** Founded in Helsinki in 1919,

Ålands posten is an example of how a newspaper can be made on a purely political basis and used as a political counterforce.

Otto Emanuel Andersson, a musicologist and ethnographer, founded the Swedish-language Ålands posten to oppose the Åland newspaper and its editor-in-chief, who wanted to make Åland a part of Sweden. The founders of Ålands posten wanted to keep the people of Åland as part of the Finnish-Swedish nation. The newspaper was published once a week and was discontinued later when the question of Åland became an intergovernmental issue and Ålands posten was no longer needed.





# A

**UDIO** The popularity of audio media, such as audiobooks and podcasts, has recently exploded, especially among young people. The number of people listening is predicted to continue to increase. The popularity of audio media is certainly due to the fact that you can immerse yourself in content wherever you are: on a run, on a school trip or even while cleaning. Audio media also makes news and articles even more easily and broadly accessible. In addition to reading the largest newspapers, you can now also listen to journalistic content, making it accessible to people with visual impairments, for example – or anyone who wants to listen to it in the car while driving.

**H****ARASSMENT** Journalists have always been threatened and pressured, but hate speech and harassment targeted against them have increased and become more visible on social media. Defamatory and threatening statements must be taken seriously, as hate speech threatens the freedom of expression of the journalist. Women, minority groups and journalists who write on specific topics such as immigration or equality are targeted particularly often. According to the Journalistic Guidelines, decisions about the content of communication must always be made on journalistic grounds, and decision-making powers must never be placed outside the editorial team.



## **FOR TEACHERS**

News Media Finland is a trade association of publishers of newspapers, free newspapers and other private news media. Our members include more than 220 news media across Finland. We work on behalf of news media in diverse ways: strengthening its vitality, producing information, organising events, communicating and supporting reader marketing. We also publish Suomen Lehdistö.

Together with our members, we support the media relationship of children, young people and adults. We produce materials for journalistic education and teaching critical media and information literacy skills. Our members collaborate regionally with educational institutions.

Our media education activities emphasise journalistic education – we focus on explaining the rules of journalism and highlighting the significance of reliable media content. Every year, we organise a national News Week in collaboration with schools and newspapers, among other things. In 2024, the association's media education activities will turn 60 years old.

Find our free learning materials at

**WWW.UUTISMEDIAKASVATUS.FI**

and subscribe to our bi-monthly lesson tips.

## NOTES



## NOTES



## NOTES



## NOTES



The role and significance of media in everyday life is enormous.

In addition to traditional literacy, media literacy is also needed.

Now, there is an ABC for learning it.

The ABC Book of Media Literacy brings together everything from

A to Z – what is good to know and be aware of when looking for reliable information, using social media or when you want to influence things that are important to you. The guide, which contains everything from algorithms to zines, provides good tools for training and developing critical media literacy.

More information

**[WWW.TUNNISTAJOURNALISMI.FI](http://WWW.TUNNISTAJOURNALISMI.FI)**