



Discussion Questions for the
2018 One Book South Dakota

Informing the News

by Thomas E. Patterson

We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of *Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism*.

1. Where do you get most of your news? Internet? Newspaper? Television? Radio? Social media? What sources do you believe are the most credible?
2. Would you agree that democracy depends on an informed citizenry? What role do journalists play in maintaining a healthy democracy? What happens when citizens don't have access to credible, fact-based sources of news and information?
3. Patterson writes that: "Public life is increasingly complex, and we need an ongoing source of timely and relevant information on the issues of the day. That's why we need journalists." Do you agree? Are there other information sources that you feel are more reliable or trustworthy?
4. As Tom Patterson points out, in 2012, only 8 percent of Americans polled by Gallup said that they had a "great deal" of confidence in the news media's ability to report the news "fully, accurately, and fairly." What factors have contributed to the public's loss of confidence in the press?
5. Research suggests that many people today pay the most attention to news sources that reflect their own personal view of the world. Is this a problem?
6. Patterson suggests that the media focuses too much on negative stories. Do you agree? If so, how does this bias affect the way that readers and viewers see the world?
7. In the early 1960s, polls showed that an overwhelming percentage of Americans trusted the government to do the right thing. Today, that percentage has fallen dramatically. What has caused this decline? What role does the media play?
8. What kinds of news sources are available to people in your community? Do they help you as a citizen understand the issues facing your community? If not, what's missing?
9. How does media coverage of crime locally and nationally affect your sense of personal security?
10. With a 24-hour news cycle, journalists say they feel pressed to report allegations before they have a chance to check the facts. Do you think this happens rarely or frequently? How does it affect your sense of whether you can trust journalists?
11. "Most news is not what has happened, but what someone says has happened," says Michael Schudder in *Informing the News*. What does this mean to you?

12. Patterson suggests that over the last two decades, especially on cable news, reporters spend more time commenting on the news than reporting it. Do you think this is true? If so, do you think this commentary is helpful?
13. To attract readers and viewers, according to Patterson, news organizations frequently pay more attention to extreme viewpoints. How does this affect the political environment and public policymaking?
14. When you think about the news you receive, do you feel that there are some stories that receive too much attention? Can you give examples? What do think needs more coverage?
15. Historically, people who paid attention to the news were generally more informed. Patterson suggests that this is no longer true because the level of misinformation has increased. Is this a problem? If so, what can be done about it?
16. Most journalists are not subject matter experts in the fields that they cover. Would news consumers trust them more if journalists had more specialized training in specific fields of knowledge (e.g. science, medicine, national security, etc.)?
17. What do you believe constitutes high-quality journalism?
18. How has the rise of social media sites like Facebook affected the way that you learn about important events in your community, the nation, and around the world?
19. What are the biggest changes in journalism that you have experienced in your lifetime?
20. What role can citizens play in covering the news?