This approach to examining media or media messages critically focuses on the people involved in the process of creating and media message and bring it to the consumers. This is just one approach can provide those seeking to be more literate in mass communication with some great questions to consider. It is particularly good at examining a message with regard to the business concerns, but it shouldn’t be thought of in those terms exclusively.

First Step

Review the simple diagram that follows. It breaks the mass communication and related messages into three phases.

Next, create a list of all the people that might be involved in each phase. For example, a few of people involved in the production phase of a movie would be the screenwriter, actors, director, producer, financial backers, composer, etc.

Distribution people could be wholesalers, the actual movie distribution company, theatre owners, etc.

Consumption people would be the actual viewers, but could also be concerned citizen groups, or regulators like the FCC.

There are generally more people involved in the production phase than the others.

It’s not important that you identify all the people involved, but you should make an attempt to get to as many different types of people as possible.

Second Step

For each person in each phase, you need to speculate about a number of things:

- Why are they involved in this project?
- What financial concerns do they have?
- What obstacles might they have faced?
- Who helped them or backed them?
- What career concerns?
- What possible pressures might they have faced?
- Was there any problem getting help or assistance?
Think about the message from their perspective. An important thing to remember is that you are speculating about these questions. It is not important that you are right or wrong, rather you are formulation questions and possible explanations for why the message was created in the first place or what effect it might have had.

Asking questions and speculating is very important to the critical thinking process that allows us to become more literate consumers of mass media.

Last Step

One you have all these speculations and questions, you can begin to form theories and ideas of your own as to why the message is the way it is.

IMPORTANT: You ideas may be wrong and that’s okay. Just don’t pass your theories off as fact. They are theories and just that. These theories often lead us to further investigate things about this message. Plus the more you learn about the way things are in the media, the more your speculations and theories might be accurate.