



PRESS FREEDOM

Workshop guide – Freedom of the press and democracy

Developed and tested during the ICES Forum France 2026

General Information

No prior knowledge is required. Suitable for Civic Education, History, English or interdisciplinary projects.

Designed by	Students from Institution Jeanne d'Arc (France)
European value(s)	Freedom of expression – Freedom of the press – Democracy – Rule of law
Pedagogical approach	Problem-based learning
Type of activity	Collaborative escape game
Recommended age	15–18 years old
Language	English (adaptable to other languages)
Duration	60 minutes
Group size	4–6 students per team

Educational context

This workshop explores freedom of the press through a collaborative escape game. Students solve a series of challenges while discovering why media freedom is a cornerstone of democracy and one of the fundamental values of the European Union.

Learning objectives

- Explain why freedom of the press is essential in a democracy.
- Identify situations where press freedom is threatened.
- Understand and explain the relationship between media, democracy and European values.
- Communicate and justify ideas during collaborative activities.

Skills developed

Critical thinking
Collaboration
Democratic awareness
Problem solving
Communication

Why this activity?

This workshop uses an escape game to make abstract democratic values more concrete. It can be used to introduce the topic, support classroom teaching, reinforce theoretical knowledge or conclude a learning sequence through an engaging collaborative challenge.



1- Before the workshop

Learning scenario

Students are introduced as members of their school newspaper. Their latest article has been censored and locked inside a padlocked box. To recover it, they must prove that they understand the principles of press freedom in the European Union. By completing four collaborative challenges, they collect the digits needed to unlock the final code and save their newspaper.

Facilitation

The workshop can be facilitated either by a teacher or by a trained group of students. In both cases, the facilitator guides the activity, manages time and supports discussion without providing the answers.

Overview

Step	Material	Quantity
During all the activity	Presentation slides	1 (facilitator)
	Student workbook	1 per group
	Computer and video projector	1 (facilitator)
	Padlock / locked box	1 (facilitator)
Mission 1	Annex 1 – Munich Charter Decoding Sheet	1 per group
Mission 2	Annex 2-1 – European Media Freedom Act Challenge	1 per group
	Annex 2-2 - Answers	1 (facilitator)
Mission 3	Annex 3 – Press Freedom Case Cards	1 per group
Mission 4	Annex 4-1 – Fact or Fiction News Pack	1 per group
	Annex 4-2 – Fact-checking checklist	1 per group
	Annex 4-3 – Answer key	1 (facilitator)

Preparation checklist

- ☐ Print the Student Workbook.
- ☐ Print one copy of the annexes for each group.
- ☐ Check the room equipment: computer and video projector.
- ☐ Set up the padlocked box.
- ☐ Arrange the room into group tables.
- ☐ Hide Annex 2-1 under one table in each group area.



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2- Workshop procedure

Step	Time	Activity / Procedure	Learning objective	Resources	Facilitator's role
Introduction	5 min	Present the scenario: students are members of the school newspaper. Their article has been censored and locked in a padlocked box. To recover it, they must complete four missions and discover the final code.	Motivate students and introduce the workshop objectives.	Presentation slides (PS) Student workbook (SW) Padlocked box	Introduce the story, explain the rules and organise the groups.
Mission 1 – Discovering a Fundamental Text	10 min	Students work to reconstruct the Munich Charter . Each group receives a section of the text containing missing words represented by numerical codes. By decoding these words, students complete the Charter before sharing their answers to rebuild the full document. They then identify the red letters , which form the word ONE and reveal the first digit (1) of the final code. Finally, they collect the blue letters , which form the hidden word TABLE , used to access the next mission, before discussing the rights and duties they consider most important.	Discover the Munich Charter as a founding text of journalistic ethics. Understand the rights and duties of journalists and recognise why freedom of expression is a fundamental democratic value.	PS + SW Annex 1 – Munich Charter Decoding Sheet	Explain that the objective is to complete the Munich Charter , not simply decode isolated words. Assign each group two missing words. Validate the completed text, then ask students to identify the hidden words (ONE). Reveal that ONE gives the first digit of the code, but keep the purpose of TABLE secret until the next mission. Finish with a short discussion on the selected right and duty.



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Step	Time	Activity / Procedure	Learning objective	Resources	Facilitator's role
Transition to Mission 2	5 min	Once Mission 1 is completed, students combine the blue letters collected by each group to form the hidden word TABLE . They must interpret this clue to locate the next mission. Students search for the document and retrieve The Annex 2 under the table , before continuing the escape game.	Encourage cooperation, observation and problem-solving.	Annex 2-1– European Media Freedom Act Challenge	Before the workshop , hide one copy of the Annex 2 under each group table. Do not reveal the meaning of the word TABLE immediately. If students struggle, encourage them to think about what the clue might refer to before providing a hint.
Mission 2 – The Evolution of Press Freedom	10 min	Students discover Mission 2 . Working in groups, they complete the missing verbs (<i>protecting, introducing, guaranteeing, enhancing</i>) to reconstruct the summary of the European Media Freedom Act. They then discuss the different measures adopted by the European Union to strengthen press freedom. To obtain the second digit of the final code, students identify the two measures that directly protect the independence of journalists or the media and justify their choice. Finally, they answer the reflection question before moving on to the next mission.	Understand why the European Union adopted the European Media Freedom Act and identify the main measures introduced to protect media freedom, journalists and media independence.	PS + SW Annex 2-1– European Media Freedom Act Challenge Annex 2-2 - Answers	Guide groups during the completion of the text without providing the answers. Once the text is complete, encourage discussion about the different measures before asking students to identify the two measures that most directly protect journalistic independence (<i>protecting editorial independence</i> and <i>protecting journalistic sources</i>). Validate the answer (2) as the second digit of the final code, then conclude with the reflection question before introducing the next mission.



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Step	Time	Activity / Procedure	Learning objective	Resources	Facilitator's role
Mission 3 – The Law Facing the Facts	10 min	Students match four real-life situations affecting press freedom with the most appropriate European principle or legal measure . Once all pairs have been correctly identified, they turn over the cards and add the numbers shown on the back of each pair. Each correct pair gives the same result (7), confirming that the matching is correct. This number becomes the third digit of the final code.	Understand how European legislation protects journalists, media independence and democratic values. Develop critical thinking through the analysis of authentic case studies.	PS + SW Annex 3 – Press Freedom Case Cards	Distribute one complete set of cards to each group. Encourage students to justify every association before validating it. Do not confirm the answers immediately; ask groups to explain which European principle or legal measure best addresses each situation. Once the pairs are validated, invite students to turn over the cards and calculate the sum of each pair. Explain that all four pairs should total 7 .



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Step	Time	Activity / Procedure	Learning objective	Resources	Facilitator's role
Mission 4 – Separate Fact and Fiction	10 min	Working in groups, students analyse three news articles reporting the same European news story. Using the Journalist's Verification Checklist , they evaluate each article against several reliability criteria (author, source, evidence, language, objectivity, verifiability, etc.). They compare their findings before identifying the most reliable article and justifying their choice with evidence from the checklist. The number associated with the reliable article (0) becomes the final digit of the escape game code.	Develop critical thinking. Learn to distinguish between reliable information , misleading information and disinformation , while understanding the importance of trustworthy journalism in a democratic society.	PS + SW Annex 4-1 – Fact or Fiction News Pack Annex 4-2 – Fact-checking checklist Annex 4-3 – Answer key	Distribute one set of the three articles and one checklist to each group. Encourage students to justify every judgement using evidence from the articles rather than intuition. During the discussion, avoid revealing the correct answer immediately; instead, ask groups to explain which criteria influenced their decision. Conclude the workshop by emphasising that checking sources, evidence and objectivity is essential before sharing information online.



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Step	Time	Activity / Procedure	Learning objective	Resources	Facilitator's role
Debriefing and Final Challenge	10 min	Students have collected four digits during the previous missions. However, the code has been scrambled . Working as a team, they must determine the correct order to form an important year in the history of press freedom in Europe . The first team to identify the correct combination (2017) unlocks the padlocked box and recovers the newspaper article. The facilitator then reveals the significance of the date: 2017 marks the assassination of Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia , a turning point in the European debate on press freedom and the protection of journalists. Conclude with a whole-class discussion linking the four missions: journalistic ethics (Munich Charter), European legislation (European Media Freedom Act), real threats to media freedom and the importance of fact-checking before sharing information.	Consolidate learning and encourage reflection on the role of press freedom in democratic societies.	PS + SW Padlock box	Do not reveal the order of the digits. Encourage groups to work together and look for a meaningful year rather than trying random combinations. If necessary, provide a final hint such as: "The code represents an important year related to press freedom in Europe." Once the winning team opens the box, explain the significance of 2017 and lead the final discussion by encouraging students to connect the different missions and reflect on the importance of media freedom, democratic values and responsible information sharing.



3- Teacher's tips

Tested during the ICES Forum, we recommend:

- Prepare all mission materials before students enter the classroom.
- Place the different stations around the room to encourage movement and collaboration.
- Avoid giving clues too early; encourage discussion within each group.
- Reserve at least 10 minutes for the final debriefing, as it is essential for linking the activities to European democratic values.

