

Case 8: Is it a recommendation or an ad?

Content note

This case explains general rules. It is not legal advice for your situation.

Overview

Students read a short story in which a publisher sends Gia a free novel to review. Her video tags the publisher but never says the copy was free. They compare the publisher’s email, the video script and Caio’s edit notes with the FTC’s disclosure guidance for social media. They then rewrite the video’s opening and caption so that a viewer watching with the sound off learns about the free copy.

Before this case

Students should already be able to:

- summarize a government guidance page accurately
- write for a specific organization and its members
- revise a short text against a checklist

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- write a disclosure policy for a student organization that matches the FTC pages
- create a one-page training handout for members

Objectives, continued

- rewrite the first three seconds and the caption of Gia’s review so they pass the sound-off check
- explain that the Endorsement Guides interpret the FTC Act and that the policy is not legal advice

Materials

- This chapter, one copy per student
- Evidence A, B, C and D
- The FTC’s Disclosures 101 page, its Endorsement Guides questions and answers, and the Endorsement Guides sections on the idea page
- Policy template: what counts as a connection, where the disclosure goes, who checks before posting

The task in this edition

Task: Write a social media disclosure policy for a student organization whose members post reviews, and a one-page training handout. Then use the policy to rewrite the first three seconds and the caption of Gia’s review.

Students make: Policy, 300—400 words, a one-page handout and a revised opening and caption

Pacing

Opener (page 149): 4 min. Short on time: 3 min. Students read What happened on their own.

Key terms (pages 150 and 151): 4 min. Short on time: skip.

Look at the evidence (page 155): 8 min. Short on time: 7 min. Students fill in only the What it shows boxes.

Look at the evidence (page 156): 5 min. Short on time: 3 min. Read Evidence D aloud; skip its boxes.

Key idea (pages 157 and 158): 10 min. Short on time: 8 min. Skip In the news.

Sort the evidence (page 159): 6 min. Short on time: skip.

Practice (page 160): 6 min. Short on time: skip.

Your task (pages 161 and 162): 15 min. Short on time: 14 min. Fill in the connections box together.

Your draft (pages 163 and 164): 30 min. Short on time: 30 min.

Check your work (pages 165 and 166): 8 min. Short on time: 5 min. Students answer the check questions only.

Questions to discuss (pages 167 and 168): 10 min. Short on time: 5 min. Discuss question 3 only.

Case 8 plan, continued

Pacing, continued

Talk about this case at home (page 169): at home.

Periods: full chapter 106 minutes; one period 75 minutes.

Standards

Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric AAC&U's rubric for recognizing ethical issues and applying and weighing different ethical perspectives. In this case: Students decide what viewers are owed when a reviewer got the product free (Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts).

Written Communication VALUE Rubric AAC&U's rubric for writing that fits its context and purpose, develops its content and uses sources and evidence. In this case: Students write a policy and a training handout for members of a student organization (Genre and Disciplinary Conventions).

Information Has Value Information has value, including as a means to influence people, so credit, access and privacy matter. In this case: Students explain how a free product creates a relationship that viewers need to know about when they weigh a review.

Standards, continued

Information Creation as a Process Information is made through a process, and how it was made affects what it can be trusted for. In this case: Students trace how placement in a spoken line, on-screen text or a caption changes what a viewer notices.

Codes of ethics

- **FTC Endorsement Guides (16 CFR Part 255):** § 255.5 Disclosure of material connections
- **FTC Endorsement Guides (16 CFR Part 255):** § 255.0 Purpose and definitions, paragraph (f)
- **PRSA Code of Ethics:** Free Flow of Information

Heat map

- **Opener (page 149):** Low
- **Key terms (pages 150 and 151):** Low
- **Look at the evidence (page 155):** Low
- **Look at the evidence (page 156):** Low
- **Key idea (pages 157 and 158):** Low
- **Sort the evidence (page 159):** Low
- **Practice (page 160):** Low
- **Your task (pages 161 and 162):** Low
- **Your draft (pages 163 and 164):** Low
- **Check your work (pages 165 and 166):** Low

Try it at your school

Check the relationship before you trust the review.

- Next time you see a recommendation, look for a disclosure in the video itself
- If you post reviews, practice a clear spoken line like “They sent me this for free”
- Share a disclosure checklist with a school media club
- Don't accuse real creators; practice on your own sample posts

Who to ask: School media or journalism advisor, a librarian, a digital citizenship teacher

Safety: Don't share personal information to get free products. Talk with a trusted adult before accepting any brand deal.

Sources

- TikTok Newsroom, “BookTok and publishing,” September 2022
- Federal Trade Commission, “Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers,” No date listed
- Federal Trade Commission, “FTC's Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking,” No date listed
- Federal Trade Commission, “FTC explanatory video,” No date listed

Case 8: Is it a recommendation or an ad?

Gia loves a novel that a publisher sent her for free, and her video review does not mention the free copy yet.

On your own Read What happened. Underline what the publisher sent Gia and what it asked for. About 4 minutes.



Gia, Caio and Mari set up a camera in a bright studio.

Your role: You're the viewer with the sound off who checks the first three seconds. **New skill:** Spot and disclose a material connection.

What happened

At 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, Caio finishes editing Gia's short video review of a new novel. Gia made the review for BookTok, where people recommend books on TikTok. She stayed up until 2 a.m. to finish the novel, and she loves it.

Two weeks ago, the book's publisher emailed Gia. The publicity team offered her a free copy of its spring novel for review. The email said she did not have to post, but it asked for a tag if she did. In the first cut, Gia never says the book was free. The only sign of the publisher is a tag in the caption below the video.

Your question: Do Gia's viewers need to know the book was free, and how should she tell them?

Caio wants to watch the cut the way a stranger would, on a phone with the sound off. He wants to know whether the first three seconds say the book was free. Gia wants to keep her honest opinion in the video. She also wants viewers to know how she got the book.

Case 8 | Opener | College educator edition

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 4 min.

✂ Short on time: 3 min. Students read What happened on their own.

💬 Say this

"Gia stayed up until 2 a.m. finishing this book. Does it matter how she got it?" — Take three answers. Do not settle it yet.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students decide a free copy makes the review a lie. **Listen for:** "She only likes it because it was free." **Then:** Ask what the evidence says about her opinion. Nothing shows it is false; the free copy is context.

📖 Support

- Read What happened aloud while students follow along.
- Explain BookTok in one sentence: people on TikTok recommending books.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example. Then write your first guess in the box. About 4 minutes.

Material connection A material connection is a relationship with a brand, like payment or a free product, that viewers might not expect.

En español: conexión material

In this case: The publisher sent Gia a free copy of its spring novel for review. That free copy is a material connection.

Disclosure A disclosure is a clear statement that tells people about a relationship or fact they would want to know.

En español: divulgación

In this case: Gia's first cut has no disclosure. The tag in the caption names the publisher but never says the book was free.

Endorsement An endorsement is a message that shares someone's opinion or experience of a product to promote it.

En español: respaldo

In this case: Gia's video review promotes the novel with her own opinion: she stayed up until 2 a.m. to finish it.

Who is involved



Gia

Made the video review

"I stayed up till 2 a.m. finishing it. That part's real. The publisher sending it free is also real, and right now it's nowhere in the video."



Caio

Editing Gia's video

"The publisher's email literally says 'free copy for review.' That's the sentence. It's just not in the video yet."

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 4 min.

✂ Short on time: skip this page.

💬 Say this

"Which key term names the free copy? Which one names what Gia still has to add?" — Wait for material connection, then disclosure.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students hear "material" as physical stuff, like paper. **Listen for:** "The material is the book." **Then:** Reread the definition: a material connection is a relationship with a brand, such as a free product.

📖 Support

- Pair students who share a language to explain each term in their own words.
- **Cognates:** connection (conexión), material (material), recommendation (recomendación), relationship (relación), product (producto), opinion (opinión), audience (audiencia), video (video).

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

🔑 Answer key

Any first guess is fine. Students return to it on the My take page.

Your first guess

Before you look at the evidence, does Gia need to tell viewers the book was free?

My first guess is ___, because ___.

➤ My first guess is that she should say it, because viewers weigh a free copy differently, but I am not sure where.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

This page continues page 150. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 150.

Reading passage

Disclosure, trust and the creator economy

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 5 minutes.

Words to know

- **Material connection:** A material connection is a relationship with a brand, like payment or a free product, that viewers might not expect.
- **Disclosure:** A disclosure is a clear statement that tells people about a relationship or fact they would want to know.
- **Endorsement:** An endorsement is a message that shares someone's opinion or experience of a product to promote it.
- **Framing:** Framing is choosing which parts of a situation a message brings forward.

The story: A sincere review with a gap

Gia made a short BookTok review of a novel she genuinely loved. She stayed up until 2 a.m. to finish it. Caio edited the video and finished the cut at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday. The review omits one fact. The publisher's publicity team sent Gia a free copy two weeks earlier, with no obligation to post but a request for a tag if she did. The first cut's spoken opening is pure enthusiasm. The video has no on-screen text. The only reference to the publisher is a tag in the caption below it.

The case is designed around a common and understandable mistake. Gia is not trying to deceive anyone, and her opinion is not for sale. She believes the tag discloses the relationship. Caio, who edits freelance video projects, knows how people watch: quickly, on phones and often muted. His edit notes are blunt. Most viewers will not open the caption, and a tag names a brand without stating a relationship.

Your role is to be the viewer with the sound off who checks the first three seconds.

Stop and think. Why does a disclosure placed in a caption function as no disclosure for many viewers?

The anatomy of an adequate disclosure

The analysis rests on three terms. An **endorsement** is a message that shares someone's opinion or experience of a product to promote it. A **material connection** is a relationship with a brand, like payment or a free product, that viewers might not expect.

Pacing

Reading: about 5 min (741 words). Short on time: read it aloud together, pausing at each Stop and think.

Stop and think

1. **After “The story: A sincere review with a gap”:** Why does a disclosure placed in a caption function as no disclosure for many viewers?
2. **After “The anatomy of an adequate disclosure”:** Caio defines success as a stranger answering without hesitation. What are the strengths and limits of that test?
3. **After “Law, enforcement and research”:** Should platforms be required to build disclosure tools into video apps? What would that change?

The anatomy of an adequate disclosure, continued

A **disclosure** is a clear statement that tells people about a relationship or fact they would want to know. The case keeps two judgments apart. Whether Gia's opinion is honest is one question. Whether viewers can weigh it with full knowledge is another.

The Case 1 concept of **framing**, choosing which parts of a situation a message brings forward, explains why placement matters as much as wording. A disclosure that exists but is not brought forward functions, for most viewers, as no disclosure. Caio's solution moves the relationship to the first three seconds, "Quick heads-up, the publisher sent me this free," spoken and on screen, and then lets Gia's hook run. He also builds in a validation step. Someone who did not work on the video watches once, muted, and answers whether the book was free. Hesitation counts as failure.

Gia's own revision shows the limit of disclosure. She drops a superlative she cannot support, the best book of the year, in favor of a claim she can: two nights, could not put it down. Disclosure addresses how the endorser got the product. It does not verify the endorser's claims about the product.

A viewer comment on another creator's review, "wait was this sponsored?? kind of feels like an ad now," shows the reputational logic. Late discovery damages trust more than early disclosure does. The case also carries a caution. That comment is about someone else, and there is no evidence that review was sponsored. Do not accuse real creators on a guess.

❓ Stop and think. Caio defines success as a stranger answering without hesitation. What are the strengths and limits of that test?

Law, enforcement and research

The FTC's Endorsement Guides, 16 CFR Part 255, apply federal law against deceptive practices to endorsements. Their current text states that material connections "can include monetary payment or the provision of free or discounted products ... to an endorser, regardless of whether the advertiser requires an endorsement in return." It defines "clear and conspicuous" as "difficult to miss (i.e., easily noticeable) and easily understandable by ordinary consumers" (16 CFR Part 255, as revised 2023). The FTC announced that update, which addresses free products and tags, in June 2023 (Federal Trade Commission, June 28, 2023).

Enforcement has targeted placement directly. In November 2023, the agency warned two trade associations and a dozen influencers over posts promoting aspartame or sugar, and it stated that disclosures must appear in the video rather than in a caption (Federal Trade Commission, November 14, 2023). Coverage emphasized that sponsors share responsibility (Food Dive, November 27, 2023).

Research supports the premise that disclosure changes perception. A study of 3,149 Taiwanese high school students found that full sponsorship disclosure helped them recognize posts as advertising (Lin et al., PLOS One, May 27, 2026).

This page continues page 152. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 152.

Law, enforcement and research, continued

Earlier research examined age differences in how adolescents respond to disclosures in sponsored influencer videos (van Reijmersdal and van Dam, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, January 18, 2020).

Communicators have their own standard. The PRSA code asks practitioners to “preserve the free flow of unprejudiced information when giving or receiving gifts by ensuring that gifts are nominal, legal, and infrequent” (PRSA Code of Ethics, October 2000). Publishers who send review copies and creators who accept them both sit inside that principle.

? **Stop and think.** Should platforms be required to build disclosure tools into video apps? What would that change?

Sources

Real source | Federal Trade Commission (FTC) | 2023

FTC Endorsement Guides (16 CFR Part 255)

Real source | Federal Trade Commission | June 28, 2023

Federal Trade Commission Announces Updated Advertising Guides to Combat Deceptive Reviews and Endorsements

Real source | Federal Trade Commission | November 14, 2023

FTC Warns Two Trade Associations and a Dozen Influencers About Social Media Posts Promoting Consumption of Aspartame or Sugar

Real source | Food Dive | November 27, 2023

FTC crackdown could change influencer marketing for food and beverages

Real source | PLOS One (Lin et al.) | May 27, 2026

Effects of social media sponsorship disclosure on adolescents’ advertising literacy and purchase intention

Real source | Journal of Youth and Adolescence (van Reijmersdal & van Dam) | January 18, 2020

How Age and Disclosures of Sponsored Influencer Videos Affect Adolescents’ Knowledge of Persuasion and Persuasion

Real source | Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) | 2000

PRSA Code of Ethics

This page continues page 152. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 152.

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document. For each one, write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Email

The publisher's email

"Hi Gia, we love your book reviews! We'd be glad to send you a free copy of our spring novel for review. There's no obligation to post, but if you do, we'd appreciate a tag. Best, the publicity team"

Look closely: What did the publisher give, and what did it ask for?

What it shows

👉 The gift and the ask: a free copy, and a tag if she posts.

What it leaves out

👉 Whether Gia has any other relationship with the publisher.

Evidence B | Video script and caption

Gia's first cut

Spoken: "You guys, I have to tell you about this book because I literally could not put it down!" On-screen text: none. Caption below the video: "@publisher #booktok"

Look closely: Where in this video would a viewer learn about the free copy?

What it shows

👉 An honest opinion, with the brand named only in the caption.

What it leaves out

👉 The relationship: no spoken or on-screen word says it was free.

Case 8 | Look at the evidence | College educator edition

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 8 min.

✂ Short on time: 7 min. Students fill in only the What it shows boxes.

💬 Say this

"Put your finger on the start of Gia's script. Where does it say the book was free?" — Wait for "nowhere." Then find the tag in the caption.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students count the caption tag as a disclosure. **Listen for:** "She tagged them, so it's disclosed." **Then:** Ask what the tag tells a viewer. It names the publisher; it never says the book was free.

📄 Support

- Give each document on its own half-page, with the email's key sentence enlarged.
- Read Caio's notes aloud. Explain that 0:00—0:03 means the first three seconds.
- **Cognates:** connection (conexión), material (material), recommendation (recomendación), relationship (relación), product (producto), opinion (opinión), audience (audiencia), video (video).

🔗 Stretch

- Ask why Caio tests the video on mute, and which viewers a spoken-only disclosure would miss.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | Edit notes

Caio's edit notes

"Watch once as a stranger, phone on mute. 0:00—0:03: does anything say free copy? Caption sits below the video; most people won't open it. Tag = brand name, not relationship."

Look closely: What does Caio want to test before uploading, and why the first three seconds?

What it shows

🔍 A stranger test on mute for the first three seconds, before upload.

What it leaves out

🔍 Any count of Gia's viewers who watch on mute or open captions.

Evidence D | Viewer comment

A comment on another creator's review

wait was this sponsored?? kind of feels like an ad now

Look closely: When does this viewer start to wonder about a sponsorship?

What it shows

🔍 Finding out late turns a review into "an ad" for this viewer.

What it leaves out

🔍 Whether that review was sponsored, and how many viewers feel this way.

What is still missing from the evidence?

🔍 Any other tie to the publisher, the platform's own label, how many viewers watch on mute, and support for her claims beyond her own reading.

Case 8 | Look at the evidence | College educator edition

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 5 min.

✂ Short on time: 3 min. Read Evidence D aloud; skip its boxes.

💬 Say this

"Put your finger on the start of Gia's script. Where does it say the book was free?" — Wait for "nowhere." Then find the tag in the caption.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students count the caption tag as a disclosure. **Listen for:** "She tagged them, so it's disclosed." **Then:** Ask what the tag tells a viewer. It names the publisher; it never says the book was free.

📄 Support

- Give each document on its own half-page, with the email's key sentence enlarged.
- Read Caio's notes aloud. Explain that 0:00—0:03 means the first three seconds.
- **Cognates:** connection (conexión), material (material), recommendation (recomendación), relationship (relación), product (producto), opinion (opinión), audience (audiencia), video (video).

🔗 Stretch

- Ask why Caio tests the video on mute, and which viewers a spoken-only disclosure would miss.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

Key idea: material connections

On your own Read the key idea and the FTC guide. Then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

An **endorsement** is a message that shares someone's opinion or experience of a product to promote it. Gia's video review is an endorsement, and her opinion in it is honest. A **material connection** is a relationship with a brand, like payment or a free product, that viewers might not expect. The free copy from the publisher is a material connection. Knowing about it gives viewers context, but it does not prove that Gia's opinion is false.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is a federal agency. Its Endorsement Guides explain how a federal law against deceptive practices applies to endorsements. A **disclosure** is a clear statement that tells people about a relationship or fact they would want to know. For a video, the FTC says the disclosure belongs in the video itself, ideally both spoken and on screen. A tag in the caption only names the brand, and it sits below the video.

A disclosure answers one question: how did Gia get the book? Viewers can still ask what supports her claims about the book itself. A clear disclosure does not make every claim in a review accurate. Do not accuse a real creator of hiding a sponsorship based on a guess.

Professional standards

Real source | Law or regulation | Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

FTC Endorsement Guides (16 CFR Part 255): § 255.5 Disclosure of material connections

"They can include monetary payment or the provision of free or discounted products ... to an endorser, regardless of whether the advertiser requires an endorsement in return."

In plain words: The FTC says a free product can be a connection that reviewers must clearly disclose, even if the brand asked for nothing in return.

Question: The publisher's email says there is "no obligation to post." Does that change whether Gia has a connection to disclose?

Case 8 | Key idea | College educator edition

Pacing

Full chapter: 10 min.

 Short on time: 8 min. Skip In the news.

Say this

"The FTC counts free products even when the brand requires no review. What does that mean for Gia?" — Wait for: the email's "no obligation" does not change the connection.

Watch for

Misconception: Students treat the PRSA code and the FTC guides as the same kind of rule. **Listen for:** "Gia broke the PRSA code." **Then:** Say: "The PRSA code binds PRSA members. The FTC guides explain a federal law that reaches endorsers like Gia."

Support

- Read the quotation aloud. Point out the label: Law or regulation, not a code of ethics.

Stretch

- Use the second FTC row: where in the first three seconds would a viewer on mute learn the book was free?

Heat check

■□□ Low.

Professional standards, continued**Your answer**

The email's wording ____, because ____.

→ The email's wording does not remove the connection, because the free copy counts whether or not a post is required. It only means Gia could skip posting.

In the news

Real source | NBC News | November 15, 2023

Influencers warned by FTC over 'inadequate' disclosures of artificial sweetener promotions

Real creators were warned for not clearly saying they were paid, the exact question this case asks.



Real source | ABC News | November 6, 2019

Popular YouTuber chimes in on federal product disclosure guide for influencers

A creator reacts to the FTC's disclosure rules, showing how the guidance lands for people who actually post.

Notes

This page continues page 157. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 157.

Sort the evidence

On your own Follow each choice to its results. Then write whose view is missing. About 6 minutes.

Follow both choices forward. Which consequences can Gia control, which depend on viewers, and what test tells her the disclosure worked?

Post the first cut with only a brand tag in the caption

Sound-off viewers never learn the book was free

Who is affected

→ Viewers deciding whether to buy or borrow the book

Disclose aloud and on screen in the first seconds

Viewers weigh the recommendation knowing the relationship

Who is affected

→ Viewers deciding whether to buy or borrow the book

Some viewers may discount the review as an ad

Who is affected

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

→ Gia's viewers. Nobody knows how many watch on mute, so I would ask a few people to watch the new cut without sound.

Pacing

Full chapter: 6 min.

✂ Short on time: skip this page.

Say this

“Follow each choice forward. Which results can Gia control, and which depend on viewers?” — Model the first chain together.

Watch for

Misconception: Students read “some viewers may discount the review” as a reason not to disclose. **Listen for:** “Then she shouldn’t say it.” **Then:** Ask what happens when viewers find out later. Follow the chain that starts with the tag only.

Support

- Let students write the letter of each result on the arrows before they write sentences.

Heat check

■□□ Low.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose the change that makes the relationship clearest. Then fix the two marked phrases. About 6 minutes.

Gia loves the novel the publisher sent her for free. Which change to her video makes the relationship clearest to viewers?

- ☐ A Tag the publisher in the caption.
- ☒ B Say and show at the start of the video that the publisher sent her the book for free.
- ☐ C Leave the video as it is, since the email said there was no obligation to post.

Why I chose it

➤ B. The FTC counts a free copy even when no post is required, so C fails. A leaves the relationship below the video. B reaches viewers first.

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

Okay you guys, I have to tell you about this book because I literally could not put it down!! ① #ad #booktok @publisher. The characters are so real and the ending destroyed me. I stayed up until 2 a.m. finishing it and then just sat there staring at the wall. Everyone needs to read this, trust me, ② it's the best book of the year and you won't regret it. Link is in my bio, go get it before everyone else does!

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

➤ Keep #ad, but add a spoken, on-screen line at 0:00 about the free copy.

Rewrite phrase 2

➤ Narrow the claim to her experience: two nights, could not put it down.

Case 8 | Practice | College educator edition

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 6 min.

✂ Short on time: skip this page.

💬 Say this

“Gia loves the book, and it was free. Which change makes that clearest?” — Take a vote before any discussion.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: Students choose C because the email said there was no obligation. **Listen for:** “They didn’t make her post, so it’s fine.” **Then:** Reread the FTC quotation. A free product counts even when no post is required.

📖 Support

- Read the three options aloud before students choose.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

➤ Answer key

A revised version: On screen and said aloud: “Quick heads-up: the publisher sent me this book for free to review.” Then: “Okay, you guys, I could not put this down. The two sisters felt real to me, and the ending caught me completely off guard. If you like slow-burn family stories, this one’s for you. If you need a fast plot, maybe not. I finished it in two nights.” Caption: “Publisher sent me a free copy for review. #ad #booktok.” The disclosure is in the first three seconds, readable without sound, and the claim is about my own reading.

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps. Fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 15 minutes.

Write a social media disclosure policy for a student organization whose members post reviews, and a one-page training handout. Then use the policy to rewrite the first three seconds and the caption of Gia's review.

Use: Case documents: the publisher's email, Gia's first-cut script and caption, Caio's edit notes and the viewer comment. Real sources: the FTC's Disclosures 101 page, its Endorsement Guides questions and answers, and the Endorsement Guides sections on material connections and "clear and conspicuous" disclosures.

You'll make: Policy, 300–400 words, a one-page handout and a revised opening and caption

Time: 75 minutes

- 1 List every kind of connection your policy covers, starting with free and discounted products.
- 2 Decide where the disclosure goes: in the video itself, spoken and on screen.
- 3 Add Caio's sound-off check as a step before anyone posts.
- 4 Write how members answer a comment like "was this sponsored??"
- 5 Draft the policy core and the revised opening on the Your draft page.
- 6 Write the full policy of 300 to 400 words and a one-page handout.
- 7 State that the policy guides members and is not legal advice.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Connections the policy covers

Payment, free products and discounted products, even when the brand asks for no post in return.

Case 8 | Your task | College educator edition

Pacing

Full chapter: 15 min.

✂ Short on time: 14 min. Fill in the connections box together.

Say this

"Your policy has to work for a member posting alone at midnight. What is the shortest rule they can follow?" — Push for rules with a who, a where and a when.

Watch for

Misconception: The policy covers only paid deals. **Listen for:** "If they didn't pay you, it's fine." **Then:** Read the FTC quotation: free or discounted products count, even when nothing is required.

Support

- Policy template: what counts as a connection, where the disclosure goes, who checks before posting
- Caio's sound-off check as a step before posting
- Model spoken line from the case: "They sent me this for free"

Stretch

- Explain that the Endorsement Guides interpret the FTC Act's ban on deceptive practices. Say why the policy guides members and does not give legal advice.

Heat check

Low.

Your task, continued

Where the disclosure goes

- In the video itself, spoken and on screen, and again in the caption.

How members answer “was this sponsored??”

☞ Yes, the publisher sent me the book free. I said so at the start of the video and in the caption.

Notes

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Standards

AAC&U VALUE rubric: Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric;
Written Communication VALUE Rubric.

ACRL Framework: Information Has Value; Information Creation as a Process.

The Case plan sheet gives each code in plain words.

Answer key

A strong response:

- Covers free and discounted products, as the FTC's Disclosures 101 page does
- Requires the disclosure in the video itself, spoken and on screen, not only in a caption or tag
- Includes a sound-off check before posting
- Says how the organization answers a comment like "was this sponsored??"
- The revised opening tells a viewer in the first three seconds that the book was free

Your draft

On your own Write your draft in the boxes. Use your planner from the page before. About 30 minutes.

Policy core: what counts, where it goes, who checks

🔗 **Disclosure policy for member reviews. This policy applies to every member who posts a review or recommendation on the organization's accounts. It guides members; it is not legal advice. What counts: any relationship with a brand that could affect a review, including payment and free or discounted products. A free product counts even when the brand says there is no obligation to post. Where it goes: in the video itself, spoken and on screen in the first three seconds, and again in the caption. A tag or hashtag alone does not count. Who checks: before posting, a member who did not help make the video watches once, on mute, and says whether the product was free. If they hesitate, the post waits.**

The law behind the policy

🔗 **The FTC's Endorsement Guides interpret the FTC Act's ban on deceptive practices. They count free products as material connections.**

Case 8 | Your draft | College educator edition

🕒 Pacing

Full chapter: 30 min.

✂ Short on time: 30 min.

💬 Say this

“Test your revised opening on a partner, on mute. Was the book free?” — This is the check the policy requires.

👁 Watch for

Misconception: The handout copies the policy word for word. **Listen for:** A handout that is all paragraphs. **Then:** Ask for three steps a new member can follow before posting.

🔥 Heat check

■□□ Low.

🔗 Answer key

What to notice in the sample:

1. Matches the FTC guidance on free products.
2. Requires the disclosure beyond a caption or tag.
3. Builds Caio's sound-off check into the policy.
4. States the policy's limits, as the challenge asks.

Your draft, continued

Revised first three seconds and caption

Spoken and on screen at 0:00: “Quick heads-up, the publisher sent me this free.” Caption: Publisher sent me a free copy for review. #ad #booktok @publisher

Notes

[illegible]

This page continues page 163. The notes for both pages are on the sheet for page 163.

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions and mark your level in each rubric row. Then write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your policy cover free and discounted products?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Does it require the disclosure in the video itself, spoken and on screen?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Does it include a sound-off check before posting?	☒ Yes ☐ No
Does your revised opening tell a viewer in three seconds that the book was free?	☒ Yes ☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No disclosure or claim support.	☐ Tag only.	☐ Names the relationship clearly.	☐ Names the relationship and supports the product claim.
Reasoning	☐ Treats opinion as a substitute for disclosure.	☐ Discloses but can't explain why.	☐ Explains why placement and clarity matter.	☐ Distinguishes opinion, relationship and product claim.
Audience & purpose	☐ Ignores viewers.	☐ Assumes viewers read captions.	☐ Works for sound-off viewers.	☐ Works across channels with consistent wording.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Adds a hashtag.	☐ Adds spoken and on-screen disclosure.	☐ Explains each placement choice for different viewers.

Pacing

Full chapter: 8 min.

 Short on time: 5 min. Students answer the check questions only.

Say this

“Mark your level honestly. Then make one change and say why.” — Ask for one moved disclosure or one cut claim.

Watch for

Misconception: Students add a hashtag and call it done.

Listen for: “I added #ad.” **Then:** Point to the Revision row: a hashtag alone is the second level. Ask where a viewer on mute would see it.

Heat check

 Low.

Answer key

How to assess: Score with the case rubric. Add checks that the policy matches the FTC pages and that the rewritten opening passes the sound-off check.

Proficient looks like:

- **Evidence:** Names the relationship clearly.
- **Reasoning:** Explains why placement and clarity matter.
- **Audience & purpose:** Works for sound-off viewers.
- **Revision:** Adds spoken and on-screen disclosure.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question. Then finish My take. About 10 minutes.

- 1 Would knowing the book was free change how much you trust Gia's review? Why or why not?

☞ Somewhat. A free copy does not prove her opinion is false, but it is a reason to compare her review with others before deciding.

- 2 Some viewers may treat a review with a disclosure as just an ad. How could Gia keep their trust?

☞ Keep the disclosure short and early, then give specifics from her own reading. Viewers who see the relationship first have less reason to feel tricked later.

- 3 Who should make sure disclosures are clear: creators, brands or platforms?

☞ Creators and brands both, since the Endorsement Guides reach endorsers and advertisers. A platform label can help, but it cannot replace Gia's own words.

My take

My claim: ____.

☞ Gia should name the free copy in her first three seconds and keep her honest opinion after it.

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

☞ Caio's notes, because a tag names a brand, not a relationship.

⌚ Pacing

Full chapter: 10 min.

✂ Short on time: 5 min. Discuss question 3 only.

💬 Say this

"Answer with a detail from the evidence, not with a real creator you follow." — Post the question numbers and take one answer per question.

🔗 Stretch

- Ask what a disclosure checklist for a school media club would include, and who would check it.
- Going further: What does a viewer need to know about how Gia got the book? Plan one way to check that viewers understood the disclosure. A view count cannot tell you that.
- Going further: Design two versions of a sponsored post, with the disclosure in a different place in each. Keep the relationship equally clear in both versions.
- Going further: Find the line in the evidence that shows the book was free. Before you call any real post sponsored, look for that kind of evidence. Do not accuse a real creator based on a guess.
- Going further: The next time you see a recommendation, look for a disclosure in the video itself. Talk with a trusted adult before you accept any brand deal. If you post reviews, practice a clear spoken line, such as "They sent me this for free."
- Analyze three real posts from brands' own accounts (not individual creators) for disclosure
- Compare FTC guidance with another country's advertising standards body

My take, continued

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

- 🔑 Viewers can find the tag if they care enough to look.

The limit of the evidence is ____.

➤ We do not know how Gia's own viewers watch or read captions.

I would change my mind if ____.

- 🔑 A stranger on mute could already tell the book was free.

Notes

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This page continues page 167.

Heat check

■ ■ □ **Question 2: Medium.** Students may name real creators they believe hide sponsorships.

Cool-down: Say: “We are talking about Gia, not real creators.” Return to the viewer comment, which is about a creator.

Talk about this case at home

Case 8: Is it a recommendation or an ad?

In this case, a publisher sends Gia a free novel, and her video review does not say the book was free. Your student read the email and the video script, then rewrote the opening so viewers learn about the free copy.

Questions to talk about

- 1 How can you tell when a video review is also an ad?
- 2 Where in a video would you look for a note that a product was free?
- 3 Why might a review still be honest if the reviewer got the product for free?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.

Case 8 | Talk about this case at home | College educator edition

⌚ Pacing

At home: this page takes no class time.

💬 Say this

“Take this page home or read it with someone you trust.” —
Nobody needs to share a personal story to complete it.