

Media Messages: Information Evaluation - Presentation Assignment



Lee McGaan, 2014

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Your next (team) project involves analyzing the print-media news article your team has been assigned in order to determine the accuracy of the information provided in the article and the likely reasonableness of the conclusions that a reader might well take away from the article.

Begin this assignment with each member of the team individually reading the news article carefully. Take care to note the following in your close reading of the article:

1. Does the article appear to be making a clear point, expecting the reader to draw a particular conclusion? If so, **what is that thesis or main conclusion(s)**?
2. Does the author appear to have a particular point of view or approach to the topic? Does this article seem to be persuasion **OR** does the author seem to be making a relatively objective effort to answer reasonable questions readers may have about the topic?
3. What are the key issues or topics that make up the article? What conclusions does the author draw concerning each?
4. What sorts of **evidence** and **reasoning** does the author use to support each of his/her main conclusions? Note specifically, all **facts** the author cites in the article. Can you determine if they are accurate?
5. What kind of general impression(s) would you expect the typical reader to take away from the article after reading it?

After you have each individually read the article closely, meet as a team. Compare notes with each other and come to a **team decision** identifying answers for each of the 5 questions above. **Write up and email your professor the team answers to questions 1, 2 and 3 above.**

Once you have made determinations about the substance of the article, you should begin the primary task of this assignment, which is preparing a presentation to the class on the accuracy of the key features of your article. The following steps may be helpful:

- Assign to several people on the team some or all of the **specific facts** you have identified as used in support of conclusions in the article. Those individuals will use their research skills to check the accuracy of those facts. You may discover those facts can be confirmed as **accurate, inaccurate, disputed,** or **"cannot be confirmed at all"** through independent/reliable other sources. Working with a **reference librarian** will be helpful in this process. Be sure to keep careful records of what you find out about the accuracy of the facts and where and how you are able (or unable) to check on these facts.
- Assign at least one member of the team to discover whatever background you can on the author of the article and the publisher. Does what you find explain anything about the point of view your team has identified in the article?
- Assign one or more members of the team to attempt to determine if other sources tend to agree or disagree with the major conclusions of the article (if any can be found on either side).

After team members have completed their research, the team will need to gather again to begin the process of creating a team report to the class (about 12-15 minutes long). In this oral report, with visual aids (likely a PowerPoint slide show and handouts), your team should present the results of your evaluation concerning the facts and overall accuracy of the news article. In the report, be sure to:

- Clearly describe/summarize the thesis and major content, facts and conclusions of the article. Include title, author and publication information, too.
- Present the results of your fact checking, including your conclusions on accuracy.
- Explain the methods and strategy you used (i.e. data-bases, kinds of sources sought, reasons for selecting certain facts as key) to confirm or disconfirm facts and major conclusions of the article. [This is a key element of the assignment and the presentation]
- Discuss the degree to which the various conclusions the author makes stand up to your review, esp. in terms of how the general conclusions compare to other sources
- Indicate the degree to which you believe the news story leads the typical reader to a reasonable understanding of the topic.
- Conclude with observations on what you have learned about the contingent nature of truth in news reporting and commentary, as well as any thoughts you have on the ethics of your assigned article and of news reporting in general.
- The visual aid / slide show should be designed to support the oral presentation but appear in form like a "poster" presentation in the sciences (that is, highlight key background and findings and be understandable to a person who reads the slides without hearing the presentation.

[There are several possible answers your team may have in terms of the accuracy of the article's facts and conclusions: "they are likely correct; they are likely false; they are in serious dispute; or, we can't figure it out." What listeners are most interested in knowing is, what methods did you use to check accuracy, what sources did you explore?

One of your slides should list the sources you used in checking the article's accuracy.] At the time of the presentation you are expected to submit a detailed outline of the presentation as well as sending a file of your PowerPoint to the instructor.

Presentations will be graded on the following basis: how clear your descriptions are of the article, its facts and conclusions; how clear and thoughtful are your explanations of the accuracy checking process, how well documented your conclusions are (use of sources for confirmation), how insightful are your analysis of the "accuracy" of the major claims of the article including the quality of your search strategy, how insightful your overview of accuracy in media are, and how well organized and well delivered the presentation is (including the quality of support materials and visual aids, oral fluency, and team participation).

[Presentation Evaluation Form](#)

DUE DATE: Thursday, Oct. 23 - in class team reports

Print Articles for Information Checking

- Carpenter, Zoe. "ICE's Widening Net." *The Nation* 229.12 (2014): 14-18.
- Fang, Lee. "The Anti-Pot Lobby's Big Bankroll." *The Nation* 229.3 & 4 (2014): 12-17.
- Gillespie, Nick and Emily Ekins. "Generation Independent." *Reason* 46.5 (2014): 22-29.
- Kay, Katty and Calaire Shipman. "The Confidence Gap." *Atlantic* 313.4 (2014): 56-66.
- Pearce, Fred. "TV as Birth Control." *Utne Reader* 183 (Summer 2014): 48-51
- Williamson, Kevin D. "Where the Sidewalk Ends." *National Review* 66.14 (2014): 29-32.